

VOLUME F: The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries



THE NORTON
ANTHOLOGY
ENGLISH
LITERATURE

THE
TWENTIETH
AND
TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURIES

VOLUME F
ELEVENTH EDITION

The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries



The Merry-Go-Round (detail), 1916, Mark Gertler. For more information about this image, see the [Image Gallery](#) for this volume.

1914–18: World War I

1922: James Joyce's *Ulysses*; T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

1925: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*

1929: Stock market crash; Great Depression begins

1939–45: World War II

1947: India and Pakistan become independent nations

1953: Premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

1957–62: Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago become independent nations

1981: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

1991: Collapse of the Soviet Union

2001: 9/11 attacks destroy World Trade Center in New York

2016: United Kingdom votes to leave European Union

2020: United Kingdom officially withdraws from the European Union.
World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a global pandemic.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The roots of modern literature are in the late nineteenth century. The aesthetic movement, with its insistence on “art for art’s sake,” assaulted middle-class assumptions about the nature and function of art. Rejecting Victorian notions of the artist’s moral and educational duties, aestheticism helped widen the breach between writers and the general public, resulting in the “alienation” of the modern artist from society. This alienation is evident in the lives and work of the French symbolists and other late nineteenth-century bohemians who repudiated conventional notions of respectability, and it underlies key works of modern literature, such as James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.

The growth of public education in England as a result of the Education Act of 1870, which finally made elementary schooling compulsory and universal, led to the rapid emergence of a mass literate population, toward whom a new mass-produced popular literature and new cheap journalism (the “yellow press”) were directed. The audience for literature split up into “highbrows,” “middlebrows,” and “lowbrows,” and the segmentation of the reading public, developing with unprecedented speed and to an unprecedented degree, helped widen the gap between popular art and art esteemed only by the sophisticated and the expert. This breach yawned ever wider with the twentieth-century emergence of modernist iconoclasm and avant-garde experiments in literature, music, and the visual arts.

To Queen Victoria’s contemporaries, her Jubilee in 1887 and, even more, her Diamond Jubilee in 1897 marked the end of an era. The reaction against middle-class Victorian attitudes that is central to modernism was already under way in the decades before the queen’s death in 1901. Samuel Butler attacked the Victorian conceptions of the family, education, and religion in his novel *The Way of All Flesh* (completed in 1884, published posthumously in 1903), the bitterest indictment in English literature of Victorian conventions. And the high

tide of anti-Victorianism was marked by the publication in 1918 of a classic of ironic debunking, Lytton Strachey's collection of biographical essays, *Eminent Victorians*.

A pivotal figure between Victorianism and modernism, Thomas Hardy marked the end of the Victorian period and the dawn of the new age in "The Darkling Thrush," a poem originally titled "By the Century's Deathbed" and postdated December 31, 1900, the last day of the nineteenth century. The poem marks the demise of a century of relative conviction and optimism, and it intimates the beginnings of a new era in its skeptical irresolution and its bleak sense of the modern world as "hard and dry"—favorite adjectives of later writers such as Ezra Pound and T. E. Hulme:

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

This poem and other works by Hardy, A. E. Housman, and Joseph Conrad exemplify the pessimism of imaginative writing in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. Stoicism—a stiff-upper-lip determination to endure whatever fate may bring—also characterizes the literature written in the transitional period between the Victorian era and modernism, including the work of popular middlebrow authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, traditional stabilities of society, religion, and culture seemed to have weakened, the pace of change to be accelerating. The unsettling force of modernity profoundly challenged traditional ways of structuring and making sense of human experience. Because of the rapid pace of social and

technological change; because of the mass dislocation of populations by war, empire, and economic migration; and because of the mixing in close quarters of cultures and classes in rapidly expanding cities, modernity disrupted the old order, upended ethical and social codes, and cast into doubt previously stable assumptions about self, community, the world, and the divine.

Early twentieth-century writers were keenly aware that powerful concepts and vocabularies were emerging in anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and the visual arts that reimagined human identity in radically new ways. Sigmund Freud's seminal book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was published in 1900; soon psychoanalysis was changing how people saw and described rationality, the self, and personal development. In his prose and poetry, D. H. Lawrence adapted Freud's concept of the Oedipus complex to interpret and represent his relationships with his parents, though Lawrence rejected Freud's negative definition of the unconscious. By the time of his death in 1939, Freud had become, as W. H. Auden wrote in an elegy for him, "a whole climate of opinion / / under whom we conduct our different lives." Also in the early twentieth century, Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890–1915) and other works of anthropology were altering basic conceptions of culture, religion, and myth. Eliot observed that Frazer's work "influenced our generation profoundly," and the critic Lionel Trilling suggested that "perhaps no book has had so decisive an effect upon modern literature as Frazer's." For both anthropologists and modern writers, Western religion was now decentered by being placed in a comparative context as one of numerous related mythologies, with Jesus Christ linked to "primitive" fertility gods thought to die and revive in concert with the seasons. Furthering this challenge to religious doctrine were the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the nineteenth-century German philosopher who declared the death of God, repudiated Christianity, and offered instead a harshly tragic conception of life: people look "deeply into the true nature of things" and realize "that no action of theirs can work any change," but they nevertheless laugh and stoically affirm their fate. W. B. Yeats, who remarks in a 1902 letter that his eyes are exhausted from reading

“that strong enchanter,” greets death and destruction in a Nietzschean spirit of tragic exultation.

These profound changes in modern intellectual history coincided with changes of a more mundane sort, for everyday life was also undergoing rapid transformation during the first years of the twentieth century. The use of electricity was spreading, cinema and radio were proliferating, and new pharmaceuticals such as aspirin were being developed. As labor was increasingly managed and rationalized, as more and more people crowded into cities, as modern communication and transportation compressed global space and accelerated time, literature could not stand still, and modern writers sought to create forms that could register these profound alterations in human experience. This was a period of scientific revolution, as exemplified in physics by the German Max Planck’s quantum theory (1900) and Planck’s countryman Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity (1905). Their Anglo-American contemporary T. S. Eliot reflects the increasing dominance of science when he argues that the poet surrenders to tradition and thus extinguishes rather than expresses personality: “It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science,” he claims, adding that “the mind of the poet is the shred of platinum” that catalyzes change but itself remains “inert, neutral, and unchanged” (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”).

The early twentieth century also brought countless advances in technology: the first wireless communication across the Atlantic occurred in 1901, the Wright brothers flew the first airplane in 1903, and Henry Ford introduced the first mass-produced car, the Model T or “Tin Lizzie,” in 1908. Not that modern writers unequivocally embraced such changes. Although some like H. G. Wells were optimistic about technological progress, many modern writers were paradoxically repulsed by aspects of modernization. Mass-produced appliances and products, such as the “gramophone” and canned goods (“tins”), are objects of revulsion in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, for example. Because scientific materialism and positivism, according to which empirical explanations could be found for everything, were weakening the influence of organized religion, many writers looked

to literature as an alternative. Finding his “simple-minded” Protestantism spoiled by science, Yeats says in his autobiography, he “made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition.” Whether or not they welcomed the demise of tradition, habit, and certitude in favor of the new, modern writers articulated the effects of modernity’s relentless change, loss, and destabilization. “Things fall apart,” Yeats wrote, “the centre cannot hold.” In *Four Quartets* Eliot describes his quest for the “still point of the turning world.” The modernist drive to “make it new”—in Ezra Pound’s famous slogan—thus arises in part out of an often ambivalent consciousness of the relentless mutations brought by modernization.

The position of women, too, was rapidly changing during this period. The Married Woman’s Property Act of 1882 allowed wives to own property in their own right, and universities began to admit women during the latter part of the century. Since the days of Mary Wollstonecraft, women in Great Britain had been arguing and lobbying for the right to vote, but in the first decades of the twentieth century, Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel encouraged “suffragettes,” as they were known, to take a more militant approach, which included boycotts, bombings, and hunger strikes. The long fight for women’s suffrage was finally won in 1918 for women aged thirty and over, and in 1928 for women aged twenty-one and over. These shifts in attitudes toward women, in the roles women played in the national life, and in the relations between the sexes, are reflected in a variety of ways in the literature of the period.

Britain’s twentieth-century political history begins with the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), fought by the British to establish political and economic control over the Boer republics (self-governing states) of the Dutch-descended South African Afrikaners. It was an imperial war against which many British intellectuals protested and one that the British in the end were slightly ashamed of having won. The war spanned the reign of Queen Victoria, who died in 1901, and Edward VII, who held the throne from 1901 to 1910. This latter decade is known as the Edwardian period, and the king stamped his extroverted and self-indulgent character upon it. The wealthy made

it a vulgar age of conspicuous enjoyment, but most writers and artists kept well away from involvement in high society; in general this period had no equivalent to Queen Victoria's friendship with Tennyson. The alienation of artists and intellectuals from political rulers and middle-class society was proceeding apace. From 1910 (when George V came to the throne) until World War I broke out in August 1914, Britain achieved a temporary equilibrium between Victorian earnestness and Edwardian flashiness; in retrospect the Georgian period seems peculiarly golden, the last phase of assurance and stability before the old order throughout Europe broke up in violence. Yet even still, under the surface, there was restlessness and experimentation. The age of Rupert Brooke's idyllic sonnets on the English countryside was also the age of T. S. Eliot's first experiments in a radically new kind of poetry, James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's in radically new forms of fiction.



Women's Suffrage. Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested at a demonstration outside Buckingham Palace, London, January 5, 1914. A leader in Britain of the movement for women's right to vote, she and other militant suffragettes were repeatedly jailed. During their hunger strikes they were force-fed.

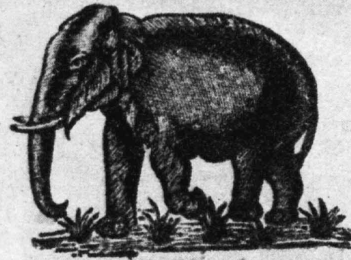
Edwardian as a term applied to English cultural history suggests a period in which the social and economic stabilities of the Victorian age—country houses with numerous servants, a flourishing and confident middle class, a strict hierarchy of social classes—remained unimpaired, though on the level of ideas a sense of change and liberation existed. Georgian refers largely to the lull before the storm

of World War I. That war, as the bitterly skeptical and antiheroic work of Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and other war poets makes clear, produced major shifts in attitude toward Western myths of progress and civilization. The postwar disillusion of the 1920s resulted, in part, from the sense of utter social and political collapse during a war in which unprecedented millions were killed.

By the beginning of World War I, nearly a quarter of the Earth's surface and more than a quarter of the world's population were under British dominion, including the vast African territories mostly acquired in the late nineteenth century. Some of the colonies in the empire were settler nations with large European populations, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and in 1907 the empire granted them the new status of dominions, recognizing their relative control over internal affairs. Over time these largely independent nations came to be known as the British Commonwealth, an association of self-governing countries. These nations, like post-apartheid South Africa, have in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries contended with the oppressive legacies of settler society, including the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the kidnapping and re-education of Indigenous children in residential schooling systems. Internationally acclaimed literary voices from these dominions span early-century New Zealander Katherine Mansfield to the late-century and twenty-first-century Keri Hulme, Australian Les Murray, and Canadians Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, and Anne Carson. The other colonies in the British Empire consisted primarily of non-White indigenous populations stripped of their political power, but nationalist movements were gaining strength in the early years of the century—as when, in 1906, the Congress movement in India first demanded *swaraj* (“self-rule”), soon to become the mantra of Indian nationalism. In Britain imperialist and anti-imperialist sentiments often met head-on in Parliament and the press, the debate involving writers as far apart as Rudyard Kipling, coiner of the phrase “White Man’s Burden,” E. M. Forster, and Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913.

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Indian Nationalist Movement Flyer. The movement for home rule, known as Swadeshi, encouraged the development of local industries to support Indian economic and political independence. Nationalists urged the boycott of English goods and the cultivation of Indigenous paper and cotton mills.

A steadily rising Irish nationalism resulted in increasingly violent protests against the cultural, economic, and political subordination of Ireland to the British Crown and government. During the Easter Rising of 1916, Irish rebels in Dublin staged a revolt against British rule, and by executing fifteen Irish leaders, the British inadvertently intensified the drive for independence, finally achieved in 1921–22 when the southern counties were declared the Irish Free State. (The six counties of Northern Ireland remained, however, part of Great Britain.) No one can fully understand Yeats or Joyce without some awareness of the Irish struggle for independence and the way in which the Irish literary revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (with Yeats at the forefront) reflected a determination to achieve a vigorous national life culturally even if the road seemed blocked politically.



Reconciliation Pole, University of British Columbia (unceded territory of the Musqueam people). A memorial to the native children forcibly separated from their families and placed in Canadian residential schools. The pole was created by Jim Hart, a Canadian artist as well as a master carver and hereditary chief within the Haida nation. It was erected in 2017 in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,

which brought to light the poor, often abusive conditions of the residential schools.

Depression and unemployment in the early 1930s, followed by the rise of Hitler and the shadow of fascism and Nazism over Europe, with its threat of another war, deeply affected the emerging poets and novelists of the time. Feminism, pacifism, and liberal attitudes regarding sexuality and gender relations were espoused by some members of the Bloomsbury Group, named after the London district where its adherents congregated, including the writers Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, as well as the economist John Maynard Keynes. But many other prominent literary figures of this older generation, such as Eliot, Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Yeats, and Pound, turned to the political right. Meanwhile, the impotence of capitalist governments in the face of fascism combined with economic dislocation to turn the majority of young intellectuals (and not only intellectuals) to the political left in the 1930s—the so-called red decade, because only the left seemed to offer any solution in various forms of socialism, communism, and liberalism. The early poetry of W. H. Auden and his contemporaries cried out for “the death of the old gang” (in Auden’s phrase) and a clean sweep politically and economically, while in Spain the right-wing army’s rebellion against the left-wing republican government, which started in the summer of 1936 and soon led to full-scale civil war, was regarded as a rehearsal for an inevitable second international conflict and thus further emphasized the inadequacy of politicians. Yet, though the younger writers of the period expressed the up-to-date, radical political views of the left, they were less technically inventive than the first-generation modernists, such as Eliot, Joyce, and Woolf. The outbreak of World War II in September 1939—following shortly after Hitler’s pact with the Soviet Union, which so shocked and disillusioned many of the young left-wing writers that they subsequently moved politically to the center—marked the sudden end of the red decade. What was from the beginning expected to be a long and costly war brought inevitable exhaustion. The diminution of British political

power, its secondary status in relation to the United States as a player in the Cold War, led to a painful reappraisal of Britain's place in the world, even as countries that had lost the war—West Germany and Japan—were, in economic terms, winning the peace that followed.



The Easter Rising. Dublin buildings destroyed during the Easter Rising of 1916. In revolt against British rule of Ireland, rebels took over key positions on April 24 until the British crushed the insurrection a week later and then executed fifteen leaders. (See Yeats's "Easter, 1916," p. 227.)

The aftermath of World War II coincided with the decline of the British Empire, which had for over a century expropriated enormous quantities of land, raw materials, and labor from its widely scattered overseas territories. India won its independence in 1947, but under the Mountbatten Plan was partitioned along religious lines. India and

the newly formed Muslim state of Pakistan were formed under the crucible of violence as millions of Hindus and Muslims were forced to migrate across newly imagined national borders. The postwar wave of decolonization that began in South Asia spread to Africa and the Caribbean: in 1957 Ghana was the first nation in sub-Saharan Africa to become independent, unleashing an unstoppable wave of liberation from British rule that freed Nigeria in 1960, Sierra Leone in 1961, Uganda in 1962, and Kenya in 1963; in the Caribbean, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, Barbados and Guyana in 1966, and Saint Lucia in 1979. India and Pakistan elected to remain within a newly expanded and reconceived British Commonwealth, but other former colonies did not. The Irish Republic withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1949; the Republic of South Africa, in 1961. Postwar decolonization coincided with and encouraged the efflorescence of postcolonial writing that would bring about the most dramatic geographic shift in literature in English since its inception. Writers from Britain's former colonies published influential and innovative novels, plays, and poems, hybridizing their local traditions and varieties of English with those of the empire. The names of the Nobel Prize winners Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, J. M. Coetzee, Doris Lessing, Alice Munro, and Abdulrazak Gurnah were added to the annals of literature in English.

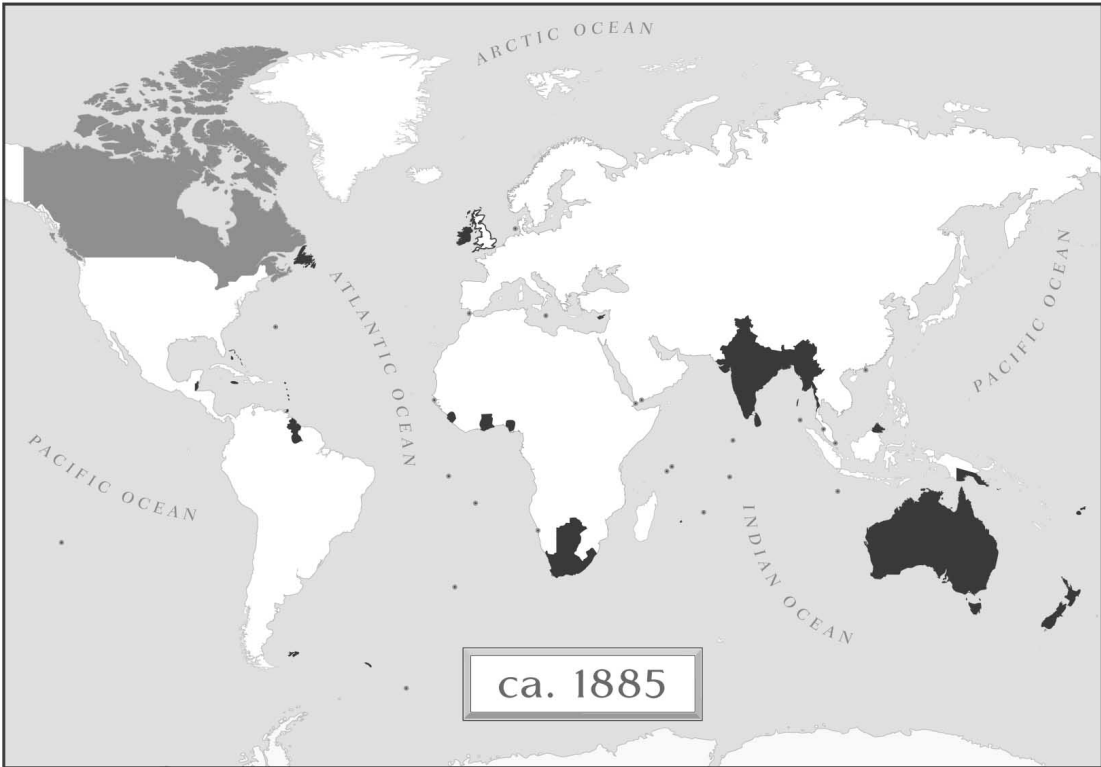
The political independence of Britain's former colonies did not solve the economic woes brought on by imperial policy's systematic underdevelopment of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Many citizens of postcolonial nations immigrated to postwar England for educational and job opportunities, but were not always greeted warmly, as Louise Bennett wryly suggests in her poem "Colonization in Reverse." Although people of color were residing in Britain long before 1948, the first large waves of migration took place that year after the passage of the British Nationality Act. Caribbean migrants journeyed to and settled in "the motherland," the first group on the *Empire Windrush* that sailed from Jamaica to Tilbury Docks, near London. Migrants followed from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, and other regions of the "New Commonwealth." Even as immigration laws became more restrictive in the late 1960s, relatives of earlier

migrants and refugees from these and other nations continued to arrive, transforming Britain into an increasingly multiracial society and energizing British arts and literature. But people of Caribbean, African, and South Asian origin, who brought distinctive vernaculars and cultural traditions with them, painfully discovered that their official status as British subjects often did not mean that they were welcomed as full-fledged members of British society. Many experienced racial discrimination in jobs and housing, and bigotry sometimes erupted into violent attacks on them, such as race riots in Nottingham and London's Notting Hill in 1958. Conservative Member of Parliament Enoch Powell delivered his infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968, foreseeing deadly interracial strife and warning against further immigration. The collision between the Anglo-Saxon conception of Englishness and the emerging multiracial reality of British society prompted a large-scale, ongoing rethinking of national identity in Britain. Among the new arrivals were many who journeyed to Britain to study in the late 1940s and 1950s and eventually became prominent writers, such as Bennett, Naipaul, Soyinka, Kamau (then Edward) Brathwaite, and Chinua Achebe. In the 1970s and 1980s a younger generation of Black and Asian British writers emerged—some born in the United Kingdom, some in the former empire—including Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, Grace Nichols, and Caryl Phillips, and in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, Zadie Smith, Bernardine Evaristo, and Patience Agbabi.

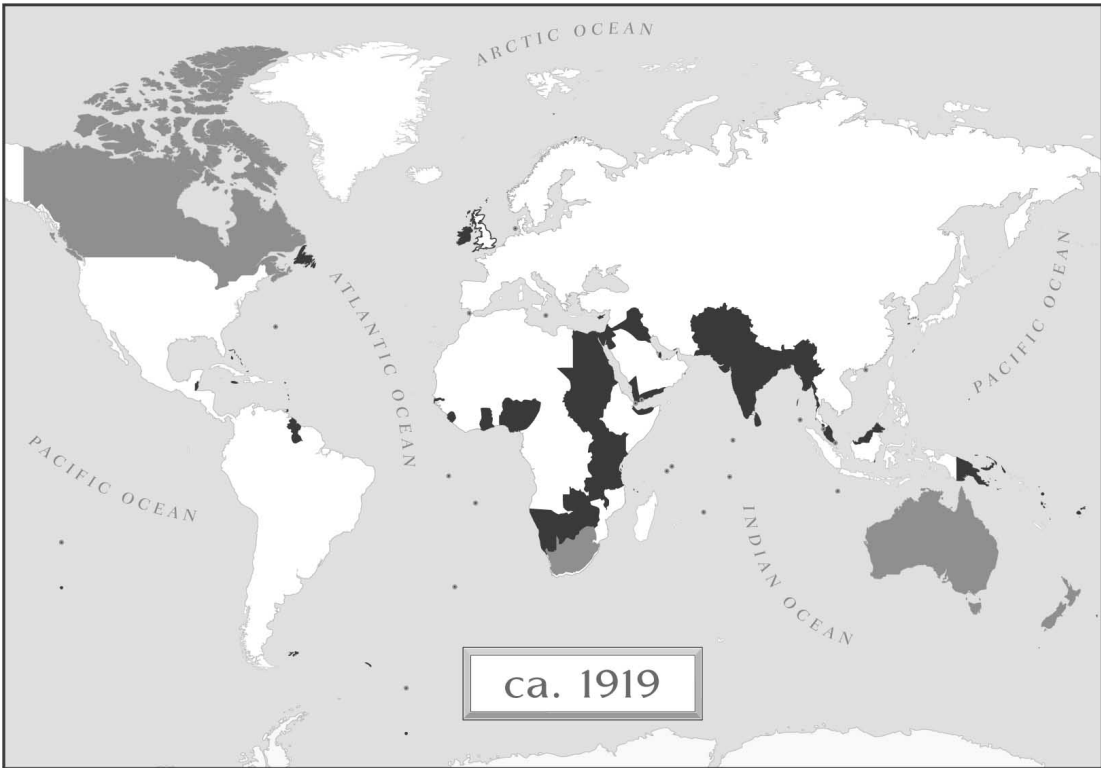


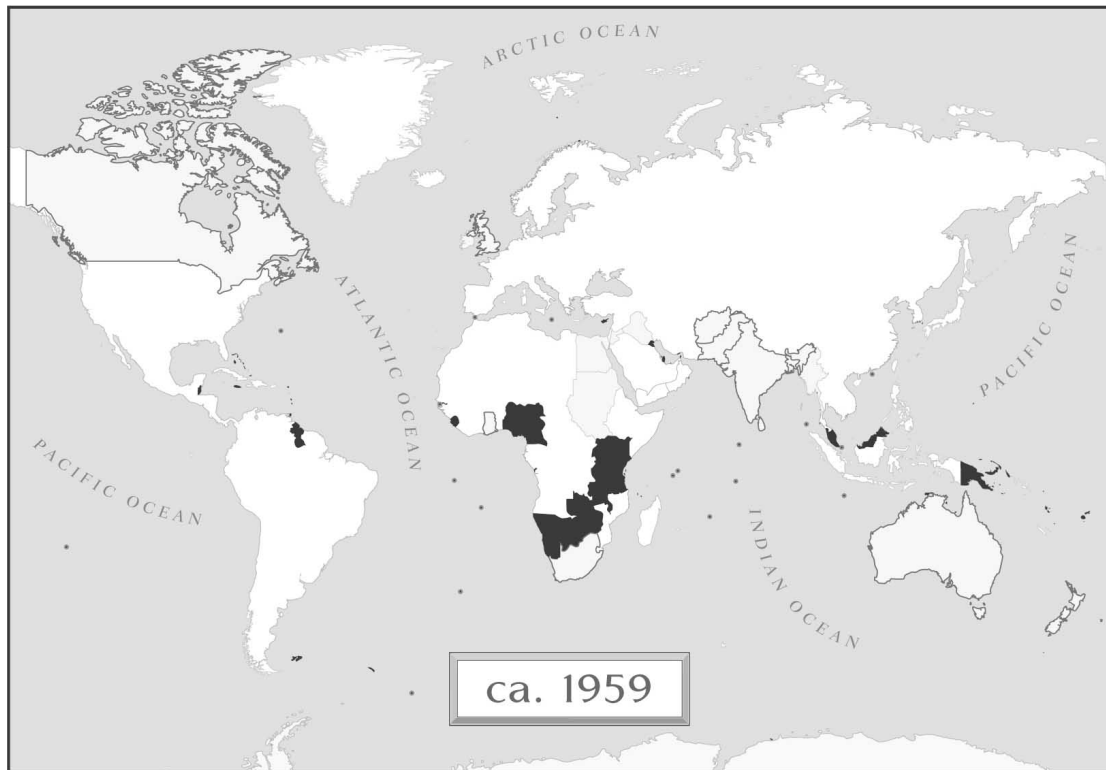
Decolonization. Dancers celebrate on the eve of Ghana's creation and independence in March 1957. After India and Pakistan won independence from Britain in 1947, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan nation to gain its freedom, beginning a wave of decolonization that swept through most of Britain's remaining colonies.

Extent of the BRITISH EMPIRE, the Late Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries

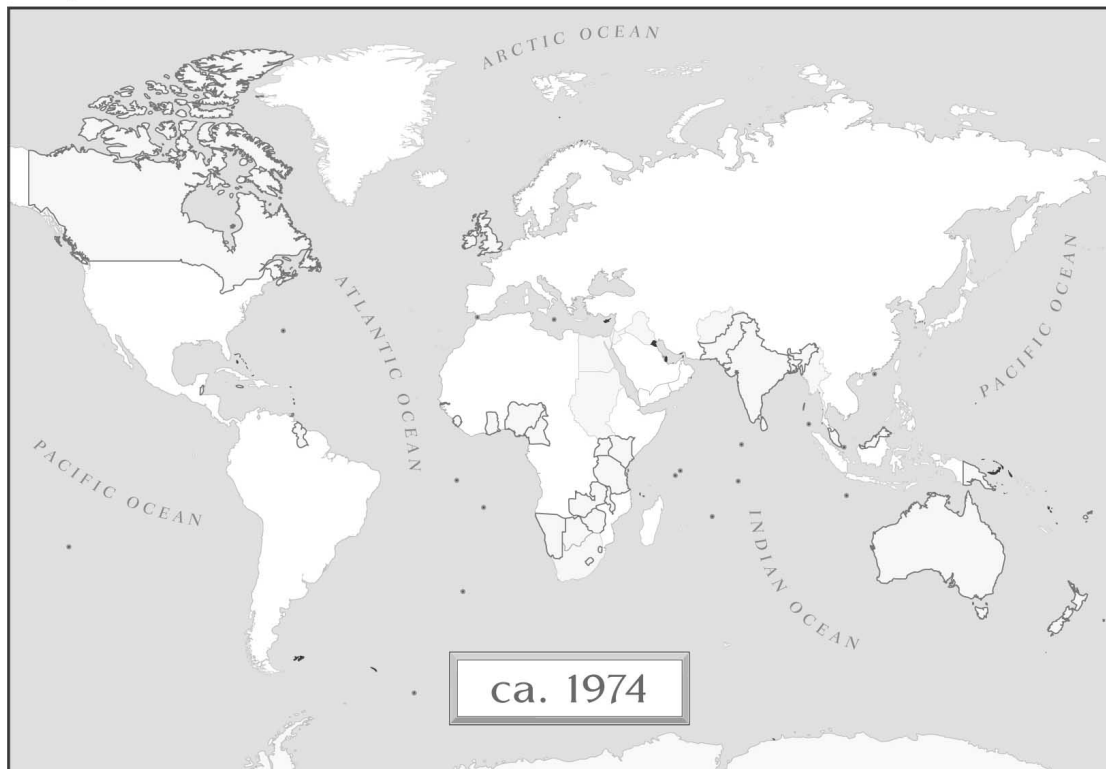


This page: ■ Colonies under full British authority ■ Colonies with dominion status





This page: Colonies Commonwealth nations Former colonies



Britain and other European powers greatly expanded their rule during the "Scramble for Africa," from 1881 to 1914. The White

settler colonies, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, were recognized as self-governing dominions in the early twentieth century. By the beginning of World War I, the British Empire included nearly a quarter of the world's population and total land area. After World War II, the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, followed by Ghana in 1957, began a wave of decolonization that spread across South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere. By 1965 the number of people under British rule outside the United Kingdom had fallen from over 500 million to 5 million. After independence, many of these nations became members of the Commonwealth, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.



Immigration. Caribbean immigrants arriving by ship in Southampton, England, July 1, 1962. The waves of largely economic immigrants from the British Empire and the

Commonwealth in the 1950s and 1960s created a multiracial Britain, which included substantial Caribbean, African, and Asian minorities.

London, as the capital of the empire, had long dominated the culture as well as the politics and the economy of the British Isles. London spoke for Britain in the impeccable southern English intonations of the radio announcers of the state-owned British Broadcasting Corporation (known as the BBC), but from the end of World War II this changed. Regional dialects and multicultural accents were admitted to the airwaves. Regional radio and television stations sprang up. In the 1940s and 1950s the BBC broadcast a weekly program called "Caribbean Voices," produced by Una Marson, and which, broadcast through the Overseas Service, proved an important stimulus to Caribbean anglophone writing both in London and in the West Indies. The Arts Council, which had subsidized the nation's drama, literature, music, painting, and plastic arts from London, delegated much of its grant-giving responsibility to regional arts councils. This gave a new confidence to writers and artists outside London—the Beatles were launched from Liverpool—and has since contributed to a notable renaissance of regional literature.

From the 1960s, London ceased to be virtually the sole cultural stage of the United Kingdom, and though its Parliament remained the sole political stage until 1999 (the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont notwithstanding), successive governments came under increasing pressure from the regions and the wider world. After decades of predominantly Labour governments, Margaret Thatcher led the Conservatives to power in the general election of 1979, becoming thereby the country's first woman to hold the office of prime minister, an office she was to occupy for twelve years—the longest tenure for any British prime minister in the twentieth century. Pursuing a vision of a "new," more productive Britain, she curbed the power of the unions and began to dismantle the "welfare state," privatizing nationalized industries and utilities in the interests of an aggressive free-market economy. Initially her policies seemed to

have a bracing effect on a nation still sunk in postwar, postimperial torpor, but writers such as Ian McEwan, Hanif Kureishi, and Caryl Churchill, as well as filmmakers such as Derek Jarman, protested that Conservative reforms widened the gaps between rich and poor, Black and White, north and south, and between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

From the late 1960s, after the failure of peaceful protests, the Irish Republican Army waged a bloody campaign for a united Ireland and against continued British rule in Northern Ireland. The mainly Roman Catholic IRA was met by violent suppression by the British Army and reprisals by Protestant Unionists, who sought to keep Northern Ireland a part of the United Kingdom. In the 1990s, politics finally took precedence over armed struggle in the Republican movement. In 1998 the Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, led to elections for a Northern Ireland Assembly, which convened for the first time in 1999, and the leaders of the main Catholic and Protestant parties were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Thatcher was deposed by her own party in 1990, but the Conservatives were not routed until the election of 1997. The electorate's message was clear, and Tony Blair, the new Labour prime minister, moved to restore the run-down National Health Service and system of state education. Honoring other of his campaign pledges, he offered Scotland its own parliament and Wales its own assembly, each with tax-raising powers and a substantial budget for the operation of its social services, and each holding its first elections in 1999. Blair and his Labour party successor Gordon Brown faced increasing skepticism over their justification for joining forces with the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 and over their handling of the economy. In 2010, David Cameron, the first Conservative prime minister in thirteen years, headed a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats, the first formal coalition government since World War II. He instituted controversial austerity measures to reduce the budget deficit. In 2016, after losing the referendum he introduced on the United Kingdom's continued membership in the European Union, he resigned and was succeeded

by Theresa May, who, after multiple failed attempts to implement a parliamentary-approved “Brexit” plan, resigned the office of Prime Minister in 2019. May was succeeded by Boris Johnson, Liz Truss, and Rishi Sunak, who took office in October 2022. The United Kingdom officially withdrew from the European Union on January 31, 2020.

POETRY

The years leading up to World War I saw the start of a poetic revolution. The imagist movement, influenced by the philosopher-poet T. E. Hulme's insistence on hard, clear, precise images, arose in reaction to what it saw as Romantic fuzziness and facile emotionalism in poetry. (Like other modernists, the imagists somewhat oversimplified the nineteenth-century aesthetic against which they defined their own artistic ideal, while minimizing underlying continuities.) The movement developed initially in London, where the American modernist poet Ezra Pound was living, and quickly migrated across the Atlantic; its early members included Hulme, Pound, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Amy Lowell, Richard Aldington, John Gould Fletcher, and F. S. Flint. As Flint explained in March 1913 in an article, partly dictated by Pound, imagists insisted on "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective," on the avoidance of all words "that did not contribute to the presentation," and on a freer metrical movement than a strict adherence to the "sequence of a metronome" could allow. Inveighing in manifestos against Victorian discursiveness, the imagists wrote short, sharply etched, descriptive lyrics, but they lacked a technique for the production of longer and more complex poems.



Brexit. A journalist displays the *London Evening Standard* in a television broadcast outside the Bank of England on June 24, 2016. The day before, a narrow majority had voted for a British exit, or “Brexit,” from the European Union. Britain had been a member of the European community since 1973, but anti-immigration feeling and skepticism toward European governance helped propel the Brexit vote.

Other new ideas about poetry helped provide this technique, many of them associated with another American in London, T. S. Eliot. Sir Herbert Grierson’s 1912 edition of John Donne’s poems both reflected and encouraged a new enthusiasm for seventeenth-century Metaphysical poetry. The revived interest in Metaphysical “wit” brought with it a desire on the part of pioneering poets to introduce into their work a much higher degree of intellectual complexity than had been found among the Victorians or the Georgians. The full subtlety of French symbolist poetry also now came to be appreciated; it had been admired in the 1890s, but more for its dreamy suggestiveness than for its imagistic precision and complexity. At the same time, modernist writers wanted to bring

poetic language and rhythms closer to those of conversation, or at least they wanted to spice the formalities of poetic utterance with echoes of the colloquial and even the slangy. Irony, which made possible several levels of discourse simultaneously, and wit, with the use of puns (banished from serious poetry for more than two hundred years), helped achieve that union of thought and passion that Eliot, in his review of Grierson's anthology of Metaphysical poetry (1921), saw as characteristic of the Metaphysicals and wished to bring back into poetry. A new critical movement and a new creative movement in poetry went hand in hand, with Eliot the high priest of both. He extended the scope of imagism by bringing the English Metaphysicals and the French symbolists (as well as the English Jacobean dramatists) to the rescue, thus adding new possibilities of complexity and allusiveness to the criteria of concreteness and precision stressed by the imagists. Eliot also introduced into modern English and American poetry the kind of irony achieved by shifting suddenly from the formal to the colloquial, or by alluding obliquely to objects or ideas that contrasted sharply with the surface meaning of the poem. Nor were Eliot and the imagists alone in their efforts to reinvent poetry. By 1912 D. H. Lawrence had begun writing poems freer in form and emotion, wanting to unshackle verse from the constraints of the "gem-like" lyric and to approach even the "insurgent naked throb of the instant moment." From 1915 the self-declared "Anglo-Mongrel" Mina Loy "mongrelized" the diction of English-language poetry and desentimentalized Anglo-American love poetry. Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay incorporated patois into his early poetry, which memorably captured village and street life in the British colony. Thus between, say, 1911 (the first year covered by Edward Marsh's anthologies of Georgian poetry) and 1922 (the year of the publication of *The Waste Land*), a major revolution occurred in English—and for that matter American—poetic theory and practice, one that would determine the way in which many poets think about their art to this day.

This modernist revolution was by no means an isolated literary phenomenon. Writers on both sides of the English Channel were

influenced by the French impressionist, postimpressionist, and cubist painters' radical reexamination of the nature of reality. The influence of Italian futurism was likewise strong on the painter and writer Wyndham Lewis, whose short-lived journal *Blast* was meant to be as shocking in its visual design as in its violent rhetoric. Mina Loy shared the futurist fascination with modernity and speed, while repudiating its misogyny and jingoism, as evidenced by her "Feminist Manifesto." Pound wrote books about the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and the American composer George Antheil, and indeed the jagged rhythms and wrenching dissonances of modern music influenced a range of writers. Wilfred Owen wrote in 1918: "I suppose I am doing in poetry what the advanced composers are doing in music"; and Eliot, while writing *The Waste Land* three years later, was so impressed by a performance of the composer Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) that he stood up at the end and cheered.

The posthumous 1918 publication by Robert Bridges of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry encouraged experimentation in language and rhythms, as evidenced by the verse's influence on Eliot, Auden, and the Welshman Dylan Thomas. Hopkins combined precision of the individual image with a complex ordering of images and a new kind of metrical patterning he named "sprung rhythm," in which the stresses of a line could be more freely distributed.

Meanwhile Yeats's remarkable oeuvre, stretching across the whole modern period, reflected varying developments of the age yet maintained an unmistakably individual accent. Beginning with the ideas of the aesthetes, turning to a tougher and sparer ironic language without losing its characteristic verbal magic, working out its author's idiosyncratic notions of symbolism, developing in its full maturity into a richly symbolic and Metaphysical poetry with its own curiously haunting cadences and with imagery both shockingly realistic and movingly suggestive, Yeats's work encapsulates a history of English poetry between 1890 and 1939.

In his poem "Remembering the 'Thirties," Donald Davie declared: "A neutral tone is nowadays preferred." That tone—Auden's coolly

clinical tone—dominated the poetry of the decade. The young poets of the early 1930s—Auden, Stephen Spender, C. Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice—were the first generation to grow up in the shadow of the first-generation modern poets. Hopkins's attention to sonorities, Hardy's experiments in stanzaic patterns, Yeats's ambivalent meditations on public themes, Eliot's satiric treatment of a mechanized and urbanized world, and Owen's slant-rhymed enactments of pity influenced Auden and the other poets in his circle. But these younger poets also had to distinguish themselves from the still-living eminences in poetry, and they did so by writing poems more low-pitched and ironic than Yeats's, for example, or more individually responsive to and active in the social world than Eliot's. Stevie Smith's poetry, though largely independent of the period style, shared its progressive politics, conversational idiom, and ironic (if often whimsical) tone, as well as an interest in adapting oral forms such as ballads, folk songs, and even nursery rhymes.

As World War II began, the Auden group's neutral tone gave way to an increasingly direct and humane voice, as in Auden's own work, and to the vehemence of what came to be known as the New Apocalypse. The poets of this movement, most notably Dylan Thomas, owed something of their imagistic audacity and rhetorical violence to the French surrealists, whose poetry was introduced to English readers in translations and in *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (1936) by David Gascoyne, one of the New Apocalypse poets. Many of the surrealists, such as Salvador Dalí and André Breton, were both poets and painters, and in their verbal as well as their visual art they sought to express, often by free association, the operation of the unconscious mind.

With the coming of the 1950s, however, the pendulum swung back. A new generation of poets, including Donald Davie, Thom Gunn, and Philip Larkin, reacted against what seemed to them the verbal excesses and extravagances of Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell, as well as the arcane myths and knotty allusiveness of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound. "The Movement," as this new group came to be called, aimed once again for a neutral tone, a purity of diction, in which to render an unpretentious fidelity to mundane experience.

Larkin, its most notable exponent, rejected the intimidating gestures of an imported modernism in favor of a more civil and accessible “native” tradition that went back to Hardy, Housman, and the Georgian pastoralists of the 1910s.

Not everyone in England followed the lead of Larkin and the Movement, some rejecting the Movement’s notion of a limited, rationalist, polished poetics. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, Ted Hughes began to write poems in which predators and victims in the natural world suggest the violence and irrationality of modern history, particularly the carnage of World War I, in which his father had fought. Geoffrey Hill also saw a rationalist humanism as inadequate to the ethical and religious challenges of twentieth-century war, genocide, and atrocity, which he evoked in a strenuous language built on the traditions of high modernism and Metaphysical poetry.

Since the 1980s, the spectrum of Britain’s poets has become more diverse in class, ethnicity, gender, and region than ever before, introducing a range of voices into the English literary tradition. Born in the northern English district of West Yorkshire, Tony Harrison and Simon Armitage brought the local vernacular rhythms into contact with traditional English and classical verse. The daughter of an Irish mother, Carol Ann Duffy was raised in Scotland in a left-wing, working-class Catholic family and grew up amid Irish, Scottish, and Standardized varieties of English; this youthful experience helped equip her to speak in the different voices that characterize her feminist monologues.

Post–World War II Ireland—both north and south—was among the most productive spaces for poetry in the second half of the twentieth century. Born just two and a half weeks after Yeats died, Seamus Heaney, his most celebrated successor, responded to the horrors of sectarian bloodshed in Northern Ireland with subtlety and acute ethical sensitivity in poems that drew on both Irish genres and sonorities as well as the English literary tradition of Wordsworth, Hopkins, and Ted Hughes. Paul Muldoon, one of Heaney’s former students in Belfast, has also written about the “troubles” in Northern

Ireland but through eerily distorted fixed forms and multiple screens of irony, combining experimental zaniness with formal reserve. A native of the Irish Republic, Eavan Boland made a space within the largely male tradition of Irish verse—with its standard, mythical emblems of femininity—for Irish women's historical experiences of suffering and survival.

The massive postwar change in the geographical contours of poetry written in English involved, in part, the emergence of new voices and styles from the "Old Commonwealth," or dominions, such as Canada and Australia. Self-conscious about being at the margins of the former empire, Les Murray fashions a brash, playful, overbrimming poetry that mines the British and classical traditions while remaking them in what he styles his "redneck" Australian manner. Anne Carson continues Canadian poetry's dialogue with its British literary origins, imaginatively transporting, for example, the Victorian writers Charlotte and Emily Brontë into a Canadian landscape, but she also illustrates a heightened interest in American poetry and popular culture, bringing into the literary mix influences that range from ancient Greek poetry to Ezra Pound and Sylvia Plath, television and video. Deliberately Canadian and feminist, Margaret Atwood writes out of the "inescapable doubleness," isolation, and alienation she ascribes to Canadian writing: "We are all immigrants to this place," she says, "even if we were born here."

From postcolonial regions came some of the most important innovations in the language and thematic reach of poetry in English. Born under British rule and educated in colonial schools that repressed or denigrated Native languages and traditions, these postcolonial poets grew up with an acute awareness of the riches of their own cultural inheritances, as well as a deep knowledge of the British literary canon. They expanded the range of possibilities in English-language poetry by hybridizing traditions of the British Isles with their images and speech rhythms, creoles, and genres. Some of these writers, such as the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott, the most eminent West Indian poet, drew largely on British, American, and classical European models, though Walcott creolized the rhythms, diction, and sensibility of English-language poetry. "I have Dutch,

nigger, and English in me,” declares the mulatto hero of “The Schooner *Flight*,” “and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.” Other poets emphasized even more strongly their African Caribbean inheritances in speech and culture. When colonial prejudices still branded West Indian English, or Creole, as a backward language, a “corruption” of English, the African Jamaican poets McKay and Louise Bennett claimed its wit, vibrancy, and proverbial richness for poetry. In the late 1960s the Barbadian Kamau (then Edward) Brathwaite revalued the linguistic, musical, and mythic survivals of Africa in the Caribbean—resources long repressed because of colonial attitudes. He also combined these sources with a pronounced emphasis on the technological media of composition, whether it be paper, tape recording, or computer. In poetry as well as fiction, Nigeria was the most prolific anglophone African nation around the time of independence, which was said to be the “golden age” of letters in sub-Saharan Africa. Wole Soyinka, later the first Black African to win the Nobel Prize, stretched English syntax and figurative language in poems dense with Yoruba-inspired wordplay and myth. At the same time, poets from India were bringing its great variety of Indigenous cultures into English-language poetry. A. K. Ramanujan’s sharply etched poems interfused Anglo-modernist principles with the south Indian legacies of Tamil and Kannada poetry. All of these poets responded with emotional ambivalence and linguistic versatility to the experience of living after colonialism, between non-Western traditions and globalist modernity, in a period of explosive change in the relation between Western and “Native” cultures.

A century that began with a springtime of poetic innovation drew to its close with the full flowering of older poets such as Walcott, Hill, and Heaney, and the twenty-first century opened with welcome signs of fresh growth in English-language poetry, including new books by Paul Muldoon, elected Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1999 to 2004; Carol Ann Duffy, appointed poet laureate from 2009 to 2019 (the first woman and first Scot to hold the position); and Simon Armitage, elected Oxford Professor of Poetry from 2015 to 2019.

FICTION

Novels—"loose baggy monsters," in Henry James's phrase—can be, can do, can include anything at all. The form defies prescriptions and limits. Yet its variety converges on persistent issues such as the construction of the self within society, the reproduction of the real world, and the temporality of human experience and of narrative. The novel's flexibility and porousness, its omnivorousness and multivoicedness, have enabled writers to take advantage of modernity's global dislocation and mixture of peoples. And while doing so, the novel meets the challenges to the imagination of mass death and world war, of the relentless and rapid mutations in modern cultures and societies, in evolving knowledge and beliefs.

The twentieth century's novels may be divided roughly into three main subperiods: high modernism through the 1920s, celebrating personal and textual inwardness, complexity, and difficulty; the reaction against modernism, involving a return to social realism, moralism, and assorted documentary endeavors, in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s; and the period after the collapse of the British Empire (especially from the time of the countercultural revolution of the 1960s), in which the fictional claims of various realisms—urban, proletarian, provincial English (for example, northern), regional (for example, Scottish and Irish), immigrant, postcolonial, feminist, LGBTQ+—are asserted alongside, but also through, a continuing self-consciousness about language and form and meaning that is, in effect, the enduring legacy of modernism. By the end of the century, modernism had given way to the striking pluralism of postmodernism and postcolonialism. Yet the roots of the late-century panoramic mix of voices and styles lay in the early part of the century, when writers on the margins of "Englishness"—a Pole, Joseph Conrad; an Irishman, James Joyce; an American, Henry James; an Englishwoman, Virginia Woolf; and a working-class Englishman, D. H. Lawrence—were the most instrumental inventors of the modernist "English" novel.

The high modernists wrote in the wake of the First World War's shattering of confidence in the old certainties about the deity and the Christian faith, about the person, knowledge, materialism, history, the old grand narratives, which had, more or less, sustained the Western novel through the nineteenth century. They boldly ventured into this general shaking of belief in the novel's founding assumptions—that the world, things, and selves were knowable, that language was a reliably revelatory instrument, that the author's story gave history meaning and moral shape, that narratives should fall into ethically instructive beginnings, middles, and endings. Trying to be true to the new skepticisms and hesitations, the modernists also attempted to construct credible new alternatives to the old belief systems.

The once-prevailing nineteenth-century notions of ordinary reality came under serious attack. In her famous essay "Modern Fiction" (1919, revised 1925), Virginia Woolf explicitly assaulted the "materialism" of the realistic Edwardian heirs of Victorian naturalist confidence, Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy. For Woolf, as for other modernists, what was knowable, and thus representable, could not be thought of as some given, fixed, transcribable essence. Reality existed, rather, only as it was perceived. Hence the introduction of the impressionistic, flawed, even utterly unreliable narrator—a substitute for the classic nineteenth-century authoritative narrating voice, usually the voice of the author or some close stand-in. Even a relatively reliable narrator, such as Conrad's Marlow, the main narrating voice of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, dramatized the struggle to know, penetrate, and interpret reality, with his large rhetoric of the invisible, inaudible, impossible, unintelligible, and thus unsayable. The real was offered, then, as refracted and reflected in the novel's representative consciousness. "Look within," Woolf urged the novelist. Reality and its truth had gone inward.

Woolf's subject would be "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day." The life that mattered most would now be mental life. And so the modernist novel turned resolutely inward, its concern being now with

consciousness—a flow of reflections, momentary impressions, disjunctive bits of recall and half-memory, simultaneously revealing both the past and the way the past is repressed. Psychoanalysis helped to enable this concentration: to narrate the reality of persons as the life of the mind in all its complexity and inner tumult—consciousness, unconsciousness, id, libido, and so on. And the apparent truths of this inward life were, of course, utterly tricky, scattered, fragmentary, spotty, now illuminated, now twilit, now quite occluded. For Woolf, Joyce's *Ulysses* was a prime expression of this desired impressionistic agenda: "he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain."

The characters of Joyce and Woolf are caught, then, as they are immersed in the so-called stream of consciousness; and some version of an interior flow of thought becomes the main modernist access to "character." The reader overhears the characters speaking, so to say, from within their particular consciousnesses, but not always directly. The modernists felt free also to enter their characters' minds, to speak as though on their behalf, in the technique known as "free indirect style" (*style indirect libre* in French).

A marked feature of the new fictional selfhood was a fraught condition of existential loneliness. Conrad's Lord Jim, Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, Lawrence's Paul Morel and Birkin, and Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway were people on their own, individuals bereft of the old props (Church, Bible, ideological consensus), and so doomed to make their own puzzled way through life's labyrinths without much confidence in belief, in the knowable solidity of the world, and above all in language as a tool of knowledge about self and other. Jacob of Woolf's *Jacob's Room* remains stubbornly unknowable to his closest friends and loved ones, above all to his novelist. The walls and cupboards of Rhoda's room in *The Waves*, also by Woolf, bend disconcertingly around her bed; she tries in vain to restore her sense of the solidity of things by touching the bottom bed rail with her toes; her mind "pours" out of her; the very boundaries of her self

soften, slip, dissolve. The old conclusive plots—everything resolved on the novel's last page, on the model of the detective story—gave place to irresolute open endings: the unending vista of the last paragraph in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*; the jump from third-person narration to a fragmentary diary at the conclusion of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; the melancholy of regret and unfulfilled desire at the end of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Novelists built modern myths on the dry bones of the old Christian ones. In his review of *Ulysses* ("Ulysses, Order, and Myth," 1923), T. S. Eliot famously praised the novel for replacing the old "narrative method" by a new "mythical method": Joyce's Irish Jew, Bloom, is mythicized as a modern Ulysses, his day's odyssey often ironically reviving episodes in Homer's *Odyssey*. This manipulation of "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" was, Eliot thought, "a step toward making the modern world possible for art," much in keeping with the new anthropology and psychology as well as with what Yeats was doing in verse. In Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*, Stephen Dedalus's last name sets up (sometimes ironic) parallels between the mythical Greek past and the aspirations of a contemporary young Irishman. Modernism's private mythmaking could, of course, take worrying turns. The "religion of the blood" that D. H. Lawrence celebrated led directly to the fascist sympathies of his *Aaron's Rod* and the revived Aztec blood cult of *The Plumed Serpent*.

Language and textuality, reading and writing, were now central to these highly metafictional novels, which are often about writers and artists, and surrogates for artists, such as Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay with her dinners and Mrs. Dalloway with her party, producers of what Woolf called the "unpublished works of women." But this self-reflexivity was not necessarily consoling—Mrs. Flanders's vision blurs and an inkblot spreads across the postcard we find her writing in the opening page of *Jacob's Room*. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, perhaps the greatest modernist example of language gone rampant, taxes even its most dedicated readers and verges on unreadability for others.

The skeptical modernist linguistic turn, the rejection of materialist externality and of the Victorians' realist project, left ineradicable traces on later fiction, but modernism's revolutions were not absolute or permanent. *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* were influential but also unrepeatable. And even within the greatest modernist fictions, the worldly and the material, political and moral questions never dried up. Woolf and Joyce, for example, celebrate the perplexities of urban life in London and Dublin, and, indeed, modernist fiction is largely an art of the great city. Lawrence was preoccupied with the condition of England, industrialism, provincial life. Satire was one of modernism's recurrent notes. So it was not odd for the right-wing novelists who came through in the 1920s, such as Wyndham Lewis and Evelyn Waugh, to resort to the social subject and the satiric stance, nor for their left-leaning contemporaries such as Graham Greene and George Orwell—who came to be seen as even more characteristic of the red decade of the 1930s—to engage with the human condition in ways that Dickens or Balzac, let alone Bennett Wells Galsworthy, would have recognized as not all that distant from their own spirit.

Despite the turn to documentary realism in the 1930s, the modernist emphasis on linguistic self-consciousness did not disappear. Instead, the new writers politicized the modern novel's linguistic self-consciousness: they deployed the discourse of the unemployed or of the West Midlands' proletariat, for example, for political ends. The comically chaotic meeting of English and German languages in Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* is central to the fiction's dire warning about Anglo-German politics; Newspeak in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the culmination of the author's nearly two decades of politically motivated engagement with the ways of English speakers at home and abroad. In this politicized aftermath of the modernist experiment, novelists such as Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* satirically engage the socio-politico-moral matter of the 1930s in part through reflections on the corruptions of language.

Where World War I was a great engine of modernism, endorsing the chaos of shattered belief, the fragility of language and of the human subject, the Spanish Civil War and then World War II confirmed the English novel in its return to registering the social scene and the historical event. World War II provoked whole series of more or less realist fictions, including Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy, as well as powerful single works such as Graham Greene's *Ministry of Fear* and Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. The new fictions of the post-World War II period spoke with the satirical energies of the young demobilized officer class (Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* set the disgruntled tone), and of the ordinary provincial citizen finding a fictional voice yet again in the new Welfare State atmosphere of the 1950s, as in Alan Sillitoe's proletarian Nottingham novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*.

Questing for new moral foundations for the post-Holocaust nuclear age, William Golding published the first of many intense post-Christian moral fables with *The Lord of the Flies*, and Iris Murdoch released the first of many novels of moral philosophy with *Under the Net*, both in 1954. Murdoch espoused the "sovereignty of good" and the importance of the novel's loving devotion to "the otherness of the other person." Murdoch and Golding were consciously retrospective (as were the contemporary Roman Catholic novelists Greene, Waugh, and Muriel Spark) in their investment in moral form. But even such firmly grounded determinations could not calm the anxieties of belatedness and a lack of grand purpose in the absence of British imperial influence over global affairs.

Some younger novelists, such as Ian McEwan and Martin Amis (son of Kingsley), became obsessed with Germany (the now prosperous old foe) and with the lingering ghosts of the Hitler era—and not least after 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down and wartime European horrors stirred into vivid focus. Whereas Conrad, E. M. Forster (*A Passage to India*), and Jean Rhys (*Wide Sargasso Sea*) had been harshly accusatory about Britain's overseas behavior, now nostalgia for old imperial days shrouded the pages of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* and Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* and *Staying*

On. Observers of English fiction worried that the only tasks left for it were to ruminate over past history and rehash old stories. The modernist Joycean strategy of resurrecting ancient narratives to revitalize present consciousness had given way to a fear that the postmodern novelist was condemned to a disabled career of parroting old stuff. *On est parlé*, “one is spoken,” rather than speaking for oneself, thinks the main character of Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*, reflecting with dismay on this dilemma. Ventriloquial reproduction of old voices became Peter Ackroyd’s trademark. Worries about being merely possessed by the past came to seem central to late twentieth-century English fiction, as in A. S. Byatt’s *Possession*, which is about the magnetism of past (Victorian) writers and writings.

Yet this was also a time for the spectacular emergence of many robust voices, particularly from historically marginalized groups—writers for whom the perceived enervation at the English center represented an opportunity for telling their untold stories. After a sensational trial in 1960, the ban on D. H. Lawrence’s erotically explicit *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was finally lifted, ensuring greater freedom in the narrative exploration of sexuality. Relaxing views on gender roles, the influx of women into the workplace, and the collapse of the grand patriarchal narratives also gave impetus to feminist revisionary narratives of history, and to the remaking of narrative technique as more fluid and free. In the 1980s and 1990s, prominent and inventive women’s voices included those of Jeanette Winterson, celebrator of women’s arts and queer bodiliness, and Angela Carter, feminist neomythographer, reviser of fairy tales, rewriter of the Marquis de Sade, espouser of raucous and rebellious heroines. In the 2010s, Rachel Cusk took the novel into new areas of candor and circumspection with her *Outline* trilogy. Among the chorus of voices seeking to express experiences once held taboo with new intimacy and vividness were those of uncloseted gay writers, such as Alan Hollinghurst, pioneer of the openly homosexual literary novel of the post–World War II period, and Adam Mars-Jones, short-story chronicler of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The literary

counterpart for political decolonization within the British Isles was the emergence of a multitude of regional and national voices outside the south of England, many deploying a vigorously local idiom, such as the Scottish novelist Irvine Welsh and the Irish writer Roddy Doyle, who reached mass international audiences through 1990s film versions of their novels *Trainspotting* (Welsh) and *The Commitments* (Doyle). Hilary Mantel, who grew up in a working-class Irish Catholic immigrant family in the north of England, brought an acute sensitivity to the outsider's perspective, even when writing historical fiction about the Tudor court, as in her novels *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012).

Not to be outdone, postcolonial novelists were simultaneously claiming for literature in English untold histories, hybrid identities, and vibrantly creolized vocabularies. A major phase in the huge geographic shift in the center of gravity of English-language fiction occurred during the postwar decolonization of much of South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, when Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) was published, just two years before Nigerian independence. Retelling the story of colonial incursion from an Indigenous viewpoint, Achebe's influential novel intricately represents an African community before and after the arrival of Whites, in a language made up of English and Igbo words, encompassed by a narrative that enmeshes African proverbs and oral tales with English realism and modernist reflexivity. A few years later and on the eve of his natal island's independence, the Trinidad-born writer V. S. Naipaul published his first major novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), one of many works that powerfully develops the potential of a translucent realist fiction to explore issues such as migrant identities, cross-cultural mimicry, and the spaces of colonialism. The Indian-born Salman Rushdie, more restive than Naipaul in relation to Englishness and English literary traditions, has exuberantly championed hybrid narrative forms made out of the fresh convergence of modern European fiction and "Third World" orality, magical realism, and polyglossia. In novels such as *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Rushdie wryly offer

a “chutnification of history” in South Asia and in an Asianized England. The colonies where English literature had once been a means of imposing imperial models of “civilization” now gave rise to novelists who, ironically, outstripped in lively imagination, cultural energy, and narrative inventiveness their counterparts from the seat of the empire. A younger generation of novelists who published their groundbreaking work after the turn of the millennium, including the Indian Kiran Desai, the Jamaican Marlon James, and the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have ensured the continued vibrancy of the novel into the twenty-first century.

White fiction writers from the colonies and dominions, many of them women, and many of them resident in England, such as Katherine Mansfield, Doris Lessing, and Jean Rhys, had long brought fresh perspectives to the novel from the outposts of empire, each of these eminent writers sharply etching a feminist critique of women’s lives diminished by subordination to the colonial order. South Africa, not least because of its fraught racial and political history, can count among its progeny some of the most celebrated fiction writers of the late twentieth century. Nadine Gordimer extended the potential of an ethical narrative realism to probe the fierce moral challenges of apartheid and its aftermath, whereas J. M. Coetzee has used self-reflexively postmodern and allegorical forms to inquire into the tangled complexities and vexed complicities of White South African experience.

Even as the categories of “British” and “postcolonial” continue to describe accurately much of the literature in this volume, the propensity of writers to migrate and make their homes across multiple regions has only grown in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. In turn, major novelists like the Japanese-born, English-bred Kazuo Ishiguro can expect their books to be translated into multiple languages outside of English within several years if not months of publishing in English. Such working conditions, in addition to the broader influence of globalization in governing the world’s economic markets, has led to the rise of the category “global Anglophone novel.” Far from being placeless, the

global Anglophone novel is preoccupied by narratives of displacement or multiple placement and conditions, such as climate change and refugeeism, which are transnational in nature. Exemplary novels, like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* or David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, array multiple geographies, histories, and even sometimes languages within their pages. Many writers associated with the global Anglophone novel grew to prominence as immigrant or second-generation writers of British multicultural fiction. These include the chronicler of transatlantic slavery, Caryl Phillips, from Saint Kitts; the skeptic of cultural assimilation, Abdulrazak Gurnah, born in Tanzania but a resident of Canterbury, England; and comedic stylists Hanif Kureishi and Zadie Smith, both born on the peripheries of London, Kureishi to a Pakistani father and English mother, Smith to a Jamaican mother and English father. Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) and Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) helped establish a paradigm for the vibrantly cross-cultural and interethnic novel. These and other "British" novelists of color give voice to new and emergent experiences of migration and cross-racial encounter. They take clear advantage of the novel's productive polymorphousness with little anxiety about belatedness, no fright over parroting, and no reservations about mixing elite and popular culture.

DRAMA

Late Victorians from one perspective, Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw can also be seen as early moderns, forerunners of the twentieth century's renovators of dramatic form. The wit of Wilde's drawing-room comedies is combative and generative of paradoxes, but beneath the glitter of his verbal play are serious—if heavily coded—reflections on social, political, and feminist issues. Shaw brought still another kind of wit into drama—not Wilde's lighthearted sparkle but the provocative paradox that was meant to tease and disturb, to challenge the complacency of the audience. Over time the desire to unsettle, to shock, even to alienate the audience became one hallmark of modern drama.

Wilde and Shaw were both born in Ireland, and it was in Dublin that the century's first major theatrical movement originated. To nourish Irish poetic drama and foster the Irish literary renaissance, Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory founded the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, with Yeats's early nationalist play *The Countess Cathleen* as its first production. In 1902 the Irish Literary Theatre was able to maintain a permanent all-Irish company and changed its name to the Irish National Theatre, which moved in 1904 to the Abbey Theatre, by which name it has been known ever since. J. M. Synge brought the speech and imagination of Irish country people into theater, but the Abbey's 1907 staging of his play *The Playboy of the Western World* so offended orthodox religious and nationalist sentiment that the audience rioted. While defending Synge and other pioneers of Irish drama, Yeats continued to write his own plays, which drew themes from old Irish legend and which, after 1913, stylized and ritualized theatrical performance on the model of Japanese Noh drama. In the 1920s, Sean O'Casey brought new vitality to the Abbey Theatre, using the Easter Rising and Irish civil war as a background for controversial plays (one of which again sparked riots) that combined tragic melodrama, humor of character, and irony of circumstance. In England, T. S. Eliot attempted with

considerable success to revive a ritual poetic drama with his *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), though his later attempts to combine religious symbolism with the chatter of entertaining society comedy, as in *The Cocktail Party* (1950), were uneven.

Despite the achievements of Yeats, Synge, O'Casey, and Eliot, it cannot be said of Irish and British drama, as it can of poetry and fiction in the first half of the century, that a technical revolution changed the whole course of literary history. The major innovations in drama in the first half of the twentieth century were on the Continent. German expressionist drama developed out of the dark, psychological focus of the later plays of the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg (1849–1912). Another worldwide influence was the "epic" drama of the leftist German dramatist Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956): to foster ideological awareness, he rejected the idea that the audience should identify with a play's characters and become engrossed in its plot; instead, the playwright should break the illusion of reality through the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) and foreground the play's theatrical constructedness and historical specificity. The French dramatist Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) also defied realism and rationalism, but unlike Brecht, his theory of the theater of cruelty sought a transformative, mystical communion with the audience through incantations and sounds, physical gestures and strange scenery. Another French dramatist, the Romanian-born Eugène Ionesco (1909–1994), helped inaugurate the theater of the absurd just after World War II, in plays that enact people's hopeless efforts to communicate and that comically intimate a tragic vision of life devoid of meaning or purpose. In such Continental drama the influences of symbolism (on the later Strindberg), Marxism (on Brecht), and surrealism (on Artaud and Ionesco) contributed to the shattering of naturalistic convention in drama, making the theater a space where linear plot gave way to fractured scenes and circular action, transparent conversation was displaced by misunderstanding and verbal opacity, a predictable and knowable universe was unsettled by eruptions of the irrational and the absurd.

In Britain, the impact of these Continental innovations was delayed by a conservative theater establishment until the late 1950s and 1960s, when they converged with the countercultural revolution to transform the nature of English-language theater. Meanwhile the person who played the most significant role in the Anglophone absorption of modernist experiment was the Irishman Samuel Beckett. He changed the history of drama with his first produced play, written in French in 1948 and translated by the author as *Waiting for Godot* (premiered in Paris in 1953, in London in 1955). The play astonishingly did away with plot altogether ("Nothing happens—twice," as one critic put it), as did *Endgame* (1958) and Beckett's later plays, such as *Not I* (1973) and *That Time* (1976). In the shadow of the mass death of World War II, the plotlessness, the minimal characterization and setting, the absurdist intimation of an existential darkness without redemption, and the tragicomic melding of anxiety, circular wordplay, and slapstick action in Beckett's plays gave impetus to a seismic shift in British writing for the theater.

The epicenter of the new developments in British drama was the Royal Court Theatre, symbolically located a little away from London's West End "Theatre land" (the rough equivalent of Broadway in New York). From 1956 the Royal Court was the home of the English Stage Company. Together they provided a venue and a vision that provoked and enabled a new wave of writers. John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), the hit of the ESC's first season (significantly helped by the play's television broadcast), offered the audience "lessons in feeling" through a searing depiction of class-based indignation, emotional cruelty, and directionless angst, all in a surprisingly nonmetropolitan setting. At the Royal Court, the working-class naturalism of the so-called kitchen-sink dramatists and other "angry young men" of the 1950s, such as Arnold Wesker, author of the trilogy *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), also broke with the genteel proprieties and narrowly upper-class set designs that, in one unadventurous drawing-room comedy after another, had dominated the British stage for decades. The political consciousness of the new theater was still more evident in John Arden's plays

produced expressly for the Royal Court, such as *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* (1959), which, in the stylized setting of an isolated mining town, explores colonial oppression, communal guilt for wartime atrocities, and pacifism. By the later 1960s, the influence of the counterculture on British theater was unavoidable. Joe Orton challenged bourgeois sentiment in a series of classically precise, blackly comic, and sexually ambiguous parodies—for example, his farce *What the Butler Saw* (1969).

While plays of social and political critique were one response to the postwar period, Beckett and the “theater of the absurd” inspired another group of Royal Court writers to refocus theater on language, symbolism, and existential realities. Informed by kitchen-sink naturalism and absurdism, Harold Pinter’s “comedies of menace” map out a social trajectory from his early study of working-class stress and inarticulate anxiety, *The Room* (1957), through the film-noirish dark farce of *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) and the emotional power plays of *The Caretaker* (1960), to the savagely comic study of middle-class escape from working-class moral attitudes in *The Homecoming* (1965). Later plays reflect on patrician suspicion and betrayal, though in the 1980s his work acquired a more overtly political voice. Though less bleak than Pinter, Tom Stoppard is no less indebted to Beckett’s wordplay, skewed conversations, and theatrical technique, as evidenced by *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) and other plays, many of which embed within themselves earlier literary works (such as *Godot* and *Hamlet*) and thus offer virtuoso postmodernist reflections on art, language, and performance. This enjoyment and exploitation of self-conscious theatricality arises partly out of the desire to show theater as different from film and television and is also apparent in the 1970s productions of another playwright: the liturgical stylization of Peter Shaffer’s *Equus* (1973) and the bleak mental landscape of his Antonio Salieri in *Amadeus* (1979) emphasize the stage as battleground and site of struggle (an effect lost in their naturalistic film versions). Stoppard’s time shifts and memory lapses in *Travesties* (1974) allow a nonnaturalistic study of the role of memory

and imagination in the creative process, a theme he returns to in *Arcadia* (1993), a double-exposure account of a Romantic poet and his modern critical commentators occupying the same physical space but never reaching intellectual common ground. *Leopoldstadt* (2020) spans fifty years and several generations of a Viennese Jewish family as they descend from joyous prosperity to grief, exile, and partial amnesia in the wake of the Holocaust. Stoppard's most personal work remains resolutely intellectual and intertextual, building on the plays of Austrian playwright Arthur Schnitzler.

Legal reform intensified the postwar ferment in British theater. Following the Theatres Act of 1843, writers for the public stage had been required to submit their playscripts to the Lord Chamberlain's office for state censorship, but in 1968 a new Theatres Act abolished that office. With this new freedom from conservative moral attitudes and taste, Howard Brenton, Howard Barker, Edward Bond, and David Hare were able to write challenging studies of violence, social deprivation, and political and sexual aggression, often using mythical settings and epic stories to construct austere tableaux of power and oppression. Bond's *Lear* (1971) typifies his ambitious combination of soaring lyrical language and alienatingly realistic violence. Directors such as Peter Brook took advantage of the new freedom in plays that emphasized, as had Artaud's "theater of cruelty," physical gesture, bodily movement, and ritualized spectacle. The post-1968 liberalization also encouraged the emergence of new theater groups addressing specific political agendas, many of them inspired by Brecht's "epic" theater's discontinuous, distancing, and socially critical style. Companies such as Monstrous Regiment, Gay Sweatshop, Joint Stock, and John McGrath's 7:84 worked collaboratively with dramatists who were invited to help devise and develop shows. Increasingly in the 1970s, published plays were either transcriptions of the first production or "blueprints for the alchemy of live performance" (Micheline Wandor). In Ireland, the founding of the Field Day Theatre Company in 1980 by the well-established playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea had similar motives of collaborative cultural catalysis. Their first production,

Friel's *Translations* (1980), exploring linguistic colonialism and the fragility of cultural identity in nineteenth-century Ireland, achieved huge international success.

This ethos of collaboration and group development helped foster the first major cohort of women dramatists to break through onto mainstream stages. Working with Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment in the late 1970s on plays such as the gender-bending anticolonial *Cloud Nine* (1979), Caryl Churchill developed plays out of workshops exploring gender, class, and colonialism. She carefully transcribes and overlaps the speech of her characters to create a seamlessly interlocking web of discourse, a streamlined version of the ebb and flow of normal speech. In *Top Girls* (1982) and *Serious Money* (1987), plays that anatomize the market-driven and ruthlessly competitive ethos of the 1980s, she explores modern society with wit and detachment. Pam Gems studies the social and sexual politics of misogyny and feminism in her campy theatrical explorations of strong women—*Queen Cristina* (1977), *Piaf* (1978), *Camille* (1984)—while Sarah Daniels reinterprets the naturalism of kitchen-sink drama by adding to it the linguistic stylization of Churchill.

Massive strides in the diversification of English-language theater occurred during the era of decolonization, when two eminent poets, Derek Walcott and Wole Soyinka, helped breathe new life into Anglophone drama. As early as the 1950s, Derek Walcott was writing and directing plays about Caribbean history and experience, re-creating in his drama a West Indian “oral culture, of chants, jokes, folk-songs, and fables,” at a time when theater in the Caribbean tended to imitate European themes and styles. After moving to Trinidad in 1958, he founded what came to be known as the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, and for much of the next twenty years devoted himself to directing and writing plays that included *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, first produced in 1967, in which Eurocentric and Afrocentric visions of Caribbean identity collide. Since then, a notable breakthrough in Caribbean theater has been the collaborative work of the Sistren Theatre Collective in Jamaica, which, following the

lead of Louise Bennett and other West Indian poets, draws on women's personal histories in dramatic performances that make vivid use of Jamaican speech, expression, and rhythm. Meanwhile in Africa, Wole Soyinka, who had been involved with the Royal Court Theatre in the late 1950s when Brecht's influence was first being absorbed, returned to Nigeria in the year of its independence to write and direct plays that fused Euromodernist dramatic techniques with conventions from Yoruba popular and traditional drama. His *Death and the King's Horseman*, which premiered in Nigeria in 1975, represents a tragic confrontation between colonial officials and the guardians of Yoruba rituals and beliefs. While Soyinka has been a towering presence in sub-Saharan Africa, other playwrights, such as the fellow Nigerian Femi Osofisan and the South African Athol Fugard, have used the stage to probe issues of class, race, and the often violent legacy of colonialism. In England, playwrights of Caribbean, African, and Asian origin or descent, such as Mustapha Matura, Winsome Pinnock, and Hanif Kureishi, the latter of whom is best known internationally for his screenplays *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1988), *My Son the Fanatic* (1998), *The Mother* (2004), *Venus* (2006), *Weddings and Beheadings* (2007), and *Le Week-End* (2013), have revitalized British drama with a host of new vocabularies, new techniques, and new theories of identity in a world marked by interconnection and inequality. The century that began with its first great dramatic movement in Ireland was followed by a century that began with English-language drama more diverse in its accents and styles, more international in its bearings and vision, than ever before.

The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1899, 1902 Joseph Conrad, <i>Heart of Darkness</i>		
	1900 Max Planck, quantum theory	
	1901 First wireless communication across the Atlantic	
	1901–10 Reign of Edward VII	
	1902 End of the Anglo-Boer War	
	1903 Henry Ford introduces the first mass-produced car. Wright Brothers make the first successful airplane flight	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
	1905 Albert Einstein, theory of special relativity. Impressionist exhibition, London	
1910 George Bernard Shaw, <i>Pygmalion</i>	1910 Postimpressionist exhibition, London	
	1910–36 Reign of George V	
1913 Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste"		
1914 James Joyce, <i>Dubliners</i> . Thomas Hardy, <i>Satires of Circumstance</i>	1914–18 World War I	
1914–15 <i>Blast</i>		
1916 Joyce, <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	1916 Easter Rising in Dublin	
1917 T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"		

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1918 Gerard Manley Hopkins, <i>Poems</i>	1918 Armistice. Franchise Act grants vote to women ages thirty and over	
	1919 Massacre of Amritsar (Jallianwala Bagh) in British-colonized India; Rabindranath Tagore renounces knighthood	
1920 D. H. Lawrence, <i>Women in Love</i> . Wilfred Owen, <i>Poems</i>	1920 Treaty of Versailles. League of Nations formed	
1921 William Butler Yeats, <i>Michael Robartes and the Dancer</i> 1922 Katherine Mansfield, <i>The Garden Party and Other Stories</i> . Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i> . Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i>	1921–22 Formation of Irish Free State with Northern Ireland (Ulster) remaining part of Great Britain	
1924 E. M. Forster, <i>A Passage to India</i>		
1925 Virginia Woolf, <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>		

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1927 Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i>		
1928 Yeats, <i>The Tower</i>	1928 Women ages twenty-one and over granted voting rights	
1929 Woolf, <i>A Room of One's Own</i> . Robert Graves, <i>Goodbye to All That</i>	1929 Stock market crash; Great Depression begins	
	1933 Hitler comes to power in Germany	
1935 Eliot, <i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>		
	1936 Edward VIII succeeds George V, but abdicates in favor of his brother, crowned as George VI	
	1936–39 Spanish Civil War	
1937 David Jones, <i>In Parenthesis</i>		

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1939 Joyce, <i>Finnegans Wake</i> . Yeats, <i>Last Poems and Two Plays</i>	1939–45 World War II	
1940 W. H. Auden, <i>Another Time</i>	1940 Fall of France. Battle of Britain	
	1941–45 The Holocaust	
1943 Eliot, <i>Four Quartets</i>		
1945 Auden, <i>Collected Poems</i> . George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i>	1945 First atomic bombs dropped, on Japan	
1946 Dylan Thomas, <i>Deaths and Entrances</i>		
	1947 India and Pakistan become independent nations	
	1948 <i>Empire Windrush</i> brings West Indians to UK	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1949 Orwell, <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>		
	1950 Apartheid laws passed in South Africa	
1953 Premiere of Samuel Beckett's <i>Waiting for Godot</i>		
	1956 Suez crisis	
	1957 Ghana becomes independent	
1958 Chinua Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i>		
	1960 Nigeria becomes independent	
	1961 Berlin Wall erected	
1962 Doris Lessing, <i>The Golden Notebook</i>	1962 Cuban missile crisis. Uganda, Jamaica, Trinidad and	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
	Tobago become independent
1964 Philip Larkin, <i>The Whitsun Weddings</i>	
	1965 U.S. troops land in South Vietnam
1966 Nadine Gordimer, <i>The Late Bourgeois World</i> . Tom Stoppard, <i>Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead</i> . Jean Rhys, <i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>	1966 Barbados and Guyana become independent 1967 UK Sexual Offences Act decriminalizes sex between men older than twenty-one
	1969 <i>Apollo</i> moon landing
1971 V. S. Naipaul, <i>In a Free State</i>	1971 Indo-Pakistan War, leading to creation of Bangladesh
	1972 Britain enters European Common Market
	1973 U.S. troops leave Vietnam

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1975 Seamus Heaney, <i>North</i> . Wole Soyinka, <i>Death and the King's Horseman</i>		
	1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran; the shah flees. Soviets invade Afghanistan	
	1979–90 Margaret Thatcher is British prime minister	
1980 J. M. Coetzee, <i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>	1980–88 Iran-Iraq War	
1981 Salman Rushdie, <i>Midnight's Children</i> . Brian Friel, <i>Translations</i>	1981 HIV/AIDS first diagnosed	
1982 Caryl Churchill, <i>Top Girls</i>	1982 Falklands War	
1985 Production of Hanif Kureishi's <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i> . Margaret Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>		

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
1988 Rushdie, <i>The Satanic Verses</i>		
1989 Kazuo Ishiguro, <i>The Remains of the Day</i>	1989 Fall of the Berlin Wall. Tiananmen Square, Beijing, demonstration and massacre	
1990 Derek Walcott, <i>Omeros</i>		
1991 Caryl Phillips, <i>Cambridge</i>	1991 Collapse of the Soviet Union	
1992 Thom Gunn, <i>The Man with Night Sweats</i>		
1993 Stoppard, <i>Arcadia</i>		
	1994 Democracy comes to South Africa	
1997 Arundhati Roy, <i>The God of Small Things</i>	1997 Labour party victory in the UK ends eighteen years of Conservative government	

TEXTS	CONTEXTS	
	1998 British handover of Hong Kong to China. Northern Ireland Assembly established	
1999 Carol Ann Duffy, <i>The World's Wife</i>		
2000 Zadie Smith, <i>White Teeth</i>		
	2001 September 11 attacks destroy World Trade Center	
2002 Paul Muldoon, <i>Moy Sand and Gravel</i>	2002 Euro becomes sole currency in most of European Union	
	2003 Invasion of Iraq led by the United States and the UK	
	2005 Bombings of London transport system	
2006 Kiran Desai, <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i>		

TEXTS	CONTEXTS
2009 Hilary Mantel, <i>Wolf Hall</i>	2010 David Cameron is first Conservative party prime minister in 13 years
2013 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <i>Americanah</i>	2013 The Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act passes in England and Wales
	2016 UK votes to leave European Union. David Cameron resigns, replaced by Theresa May
2019 Bernadine Evaristo, <i>Girl, Woman, Other</i>	2020 UK withdraws from the European Union. World Health Organization declares COVID-19 a global pandemic

THOMAS HARDY

1840–1928

Thomas Hardy was born in the Dorset hamlet of Higher Bockhampton, in that area of southwest England that he was to make the “Wessex” of his fiction and poetry. The son of a stonemason, the young Hardy was kept mostly at home, where he closely observed and came to love the surrounding countryside, the rhythms of the seasons and the songs, stories, and folk beliefs of a still predominantly oral culture. He attended local schools until the age of sixteen, when he was apprenticed to a Dorchester architect in whose office he remained for six years. In 1862 he moved to London and found a position as a draftsman in the office of Arthur Blomfield, a leading architect of Gothic-style buildings. Meanwhile, as Hardy was completing his general education informally through his eclectic reading, he began to study and write poetry. His first novel, seen as an attack on upper-class pretensions, was rejected by publishers in 1868, though one of the readers, George Meredith, advised Hardy to write another work of fiction, with a more complicated plot. The result was the sensational novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871), which was followed by a tale of rural life, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872). The serialization of his next two novels, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1872–73) and *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), provided him with sufficient income to abandon architecture for literature. He continued to write novels until the sexual frankness and irreligiousness of his last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), resulted in

a hostile critical reception, including reviews headed “Jude the Obscene” and “Hardy the Degenerate.” Financial security finally enabled Hardy to make his long-desired return to poetry. Straddling the Victorian and modern periods, he published all his novels in the nineteenth century, and all but the first of his poetry collections, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898), in the twentieth. His remarkable epic drama of the Napoleonic Wars, *The Dynasts*, came out in three parts between 1903 and 1908, and he continued to write verse until his death, at age eighty-seven.

In Hardy’s fiction, set in the predominantly rural “Wessex,” acutely observed and richly detailed, the forces of nature outside and inside individuals combine to shape human destiny. Against a background of immemorial agricultural labor, with ancient monuments such as Stonehenge or a Roman amphitheater reminding us of the past, he presents characters at the mercy of elements beyond their control: their emotions or sexual impulses, and the barriers of social class and restrictions of social mores. Men and women in Hardy’s fiction are rarely masters of their fates; walking long distances across a landscape that dwarfs them, they may be subjected to the indifferent forces that manipulate their behavior and their relations with others. They can achieve dignity, however, through endurance, heroism, or simple strength of character. Most of his fiction is tragic or at least tragicomic, observing humanity with a mixture of cold detachment and searching empathy, and exploring the bitter ironies of life with an almost malevolent staging of coincidence to emphasize the disparity between human desire and ambition, on the one hand, and, on the other, what fate—often determined by the character’s very nature—has in store. One of the darkest of Hardy’s novels, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), is the story of an intelligent and sensitive young woman, daughter of a poor family, who is driven to murder, and thus to death by hanging, by a painfully ironic concatenation of events and circumstances. Published in the same year as *Tess*, the story anthologized here, “On the Western Circuit,” similarly has at its center a young country woman deceived by a sophisticated city

man; her “ruin” (see also Hardy’s poem “The Ruined Maid”) leads—contrary to the good intentions of the three protagonists, and again as the result of bitter irony—to *his* ruin and a lifetime of misery for all concerned.

Hardy denied that he was a pessimist, calling himself a “meliorist”—that is, one who believes that the world can be made better by human effort. But there is little sign of meliorism in either his fiction or his poetry. A number of his poems, such as the one he wrote about the *Titanic* disaster, “The Convergence of the Twain,” illustrate the perversity of fate, the disastrous or ironic coincidence of events. Other poems go beyond this mood to present, with quiet gravity and a carefully controlled elegiac feeling, some aspect of human sorrow, loss, frustration, or regret, always grounded in a particular, fully realized situation. “Hap” shows Hardy in the characteristic mood of complaining about the irony of human destiny in a universe ruled by chance, while “The Walk” (one of a group of poems written after the death of his first wife in 1912) gives, with remarkable power, concrete embodiment to a sense of loss.

Hardy’s verse, like his prose, often has a self-taught air about it; both can seem, on first reading, roughly hewn. He said he wanted to avoid “the jewelled line,” and like many modern and contemporary poets, he sought instead what he called “dissonances, and other irregularities” in his art, because they convey more authenticity and spontaneity. “Art is a disproportioning . . . of realities,” he declared. While adhering to the metered line, Hardy roughens prosody and contorts syntax, and he creates irregular and complex stanza forms. His diction includes archaisms and deliberately awkward coinages (for example, “Powerfuller” and “unblooms” in “Hap”). He distorts, vigorously revises, and sometimes forces together conventions of traditional genres such as the sonnet, the ballad, the love poem, the war poem, and the elegy. Though rooted in the Victorian period, Hardy thus looks ahead to the dislocations of poetic form carried out by subsequent poets of the twentieth century.

The sadness in Hardy—his skepticism about the existence of a benevolent God, his sense of the waste and frustration involved in

human life, his insistent irony when faced with moral or metaphysical questions—is part of the late Victorian mood, found also, say, in A. E. Housman's poetry and, earlier, in Edward FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, published when Hardy was eighteen. Although his attitudes toward the sacred remained tangled and vexed, what has been termed "the disappearance of God" affected him more deeply than it did many of his contemporaries, not least because as a young man he seriously considered becoming a Church of England priest. Yet his characteristic themes and attitudes cannot be viewed simply as the reaction to the scientific and philosophical developments (Darwin's theory of evolution, for example) that we see in many forms in late nineteenth-century literature. The favorite poetic mood of both Tennyson and Matthew Arnold was also elegiac (e.g., in Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break" and Arnold's "Dover Beach"), but the mood of Hardy's poetry differs from Victorian sorrow; it is sterner, more skeptical, as though braced by a long look at the worst. It is this sternness, this ruggedness of his poetry, together with its verbal and emotional integrity, its formal variety and tonal complexity, its quietly searching individual accent and even occasional playfulness, that helped bring about the steady rise in Hardy's reputation as a poet. Ezra Pound remarked in a 1934 letter: "Nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died." W. H. Auden begins an essay with this testament to the effect of Hardy's verse: "I cannot write objectively about Thomas Hardy because I was once in love with him." And Hardy appears as the major figure—with more poems than either Yeats or Eliot—in Philip Larkin's influential *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* (1973).

On the Western Circuit¹

Endnotes

- Note 1:
When first published in magazine form in England and America in 1891, "On the Western Circuit" was altered to minimize its illicit sexuality. References to Anna's seduction and pregnancy were eliminated, and Mrs. Harnham was made a widow rather than a wife. When Hardy published the story in his collection *Life's Little Ironies* (1894), he restored it to its original form. The Western Circuit was the subdivision of England's High Court of Justice with jurisdiction over the southwestern counties. In Hardy's literary landscape Melchester is Salisbury, which has a particularly beautiful cathedral.

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I

The man who played the disturbing part in the two quiet feminine lives hereunder depicted—no great man, in any sense, by the way—first had knowledge of them on an October evening, in the city of Melchester. He had been standing in the Close,² vainly endeavouring to gain amid the darkness a glimpse of the most homogeneous pile of mediæval architecture in England, which towered and tapered from the damp and level sward³ in front of him. While he stood the presence of the Cathedral walls was revealed rather by the ear than by the eyes; he could not see them, but they reflected sharply a roar of sound which entered the Close by a street leading from the city square, and, falling upon the building, was flung back upon him.

He postponed till the morrow his attempt to examine the deserted edifice, and turned his attention to the noise. It was compounded of steam barrel-organs, the clanging of gongs, the ringing of hand-bells, the clack of rattles, and the undistinguishable shouts of men. A lurid light hung in the air in the direction of the tumult. Thitherward he went, passing under the arched gateway, along a straight street, and into the square.

He might have searched Europe over for a greater contrast between juxtaposed scenes. The spectacle was that of the eighth chasm of the Inferno as to colour and flame, and, as to mirth, a development of the Homeric heaven. A smoky glare, of the complexion of brass-filings, ascended from the fiery tongues of innumerable naphtha lamps affixed to booths, stalls, and other temporary erections which crowded the spacious market-square. In front of this irradiation scores of human figures, more or less in profile, were darting athwart and across, up, down, and around, like gnats against a sunset.

Their motions were so rhythmical that they seemed to be moved by machinery. And it presently appeared that they were moved by machinery indeed; the figures being those of the patrons of swings, see-saws, flying-leaps, above all of the three steam roundabouts⁴

which occupied the centre of the position. It was from the latter that the din of steam-organs came.

Throbbing humanity in full light was, on second thoughts, better than architecture in the dark. The young man, lighting a short pipe, and putting his hat on one side and one hand in his pocket, to throw himself into harmony with his new environment, drew near to the largest and most patronized of the steam circuses, as the roundabouts were called by their owners. This was one of brilliant finish, and it was now in full revolution. The musical instrument around which and to whose tones the riders revolved, directed its trumpet-mouths of brass upon the young man, and the long plate-glass mirrors set at angles, which revolved with the machine, flashed the gyrating personages and hobby-horses kaleidoscopically into his eyes.

It could now be seen that he was unlike the majority of the crowd. A gentlemanly young fellow, one of the species found in large towns only, and London particularly, built on delicate lines, well, though not fashionably dressed, he appeared to belong to the professional class; he had nothing square or practical about his look, much that was curvilinear and sensuous. Indeed, some would have called him a man not altogether typical of the middle-class male of a century wherein sordid ambition is the master-passion that seems to be taking the time-honoured place of love.

The revolving figures passed before his eyes with an unexpected and quiet grace in a throng whose natural movements did not suggest gracefulness or quietude as a rule. By some contrivance there was imparted to each of the hobby-horses a motion which was really the triumph and perfection of roundabout inventiveness—a galloping rise and fall, so timed that, of each pair of steeds, one was on the spring while the other was on the pitch. The riders were quite fascinated by these equine undulations in this most delightful holiday-game of our times. There were riders as young as six, and as old as sixty years, with every age between. At first it was difficult to catch a personality, but by and by the observer's eyes centred on the prettiest girl out of the several pretty ones revolving.

It was not that one with the light frock and light hat whom he had been at first attracted by; no, it was the one with the black cape, grey skirt, light gloves and—no, not even she, but the one behind her; she with the crimson skirt, dark jacket, brown hat and brown gloves. Unmistakably that was the prettiest girl.

Having finally selected her, this idle spectator studied her as well as he was able during each of her brief transits across his visual field. She was absolutely unconscious of everything save the act of riding: her features were rapt in an ecstatic dreaminess; for the moment she did not know her age or her history or her lineaments, much less her troubles. He himself was full of vague latter-day glooms and popular melancholies, and it was a refreshing sensation to behold this young thing then and there, absolutely as happy as if she were in a Paradise.

Dreading the moment when the inexorable stoker, grimily lurking behind the glittering rococo-work,⁵ should decide that this set of riders had had their pennyworth, and bring the whole concern of steam-engine, horses, mirrors, trumpets, drums, cymbals, and such-like to pause and silence, he waited for her every reappearance, glancing indifferently over the intervening forms, including the two plainer girls, the old woman and child, the two youngsters, the newly-married couple, the old man with a clay pipe, the sparkish youth with a ring, the young ladies in the chariot, the pair of journeyman⁶ carpenters, and others, till his select country beauty followed on again in her place. He had never seen a fairer product of nature, and at each round she made a deeper mark in his sentiments. The stoppage then came, and the sighs of the riders were audible.

He moved round to the place at which he reckoned she would alight; but she retained her seat. The empty saddles began to refill, and she plainly was deciding to have another turn. The young man drew up to the side of her steed, and pleasantly asked her if she had enjoyed her ride.

‘O yes!’ she said, with dancing eyes. ‘It has been quite unlike anything I have ever felt in my life before!’

It was not difficult to fall into conversation with her. Unreserved—too unreserved—by nature, she was not experienced enough to be reserved by art, and after a little coaxing she answered his remarks readily. She had come to live in Melchester from a village on the Great Plain,⁷ and this was the first time that she had ever seen a steam-circus; she could not understand how such wonderful machines were made. She had come to the city on the invitation of Mrs Harnham, who had taken her into her household to train her as a servant, if she showed any aptitude. Mrs Harnham was a young lady who before she married had been Miss Edith White, living in the country near the speaker's cottage; she was now very kind to her through knowing her in childhood so well. She was even taking the trouble to educate her. Mrs Harnham was the only friend she had in the world, and being without children had wished to have her near her in preference to anybody else, though she had only lately come; allowed her to do almost as she liked, and to have a holiday whenever she asked for it. The husband of this kind young lady was a rich wine-merchant of the town, but Mrs Harnham did not care much about him. In the daytime you could see the house from where they were talking. She, the speaker, liked Melchester better than the lonely country, and she was going to have a new hat for next Sunday that was to cost fifteen and ninepence.⁸

Then she inquired of her acquaintance where he lived, and he told her in London, that ancient and smoky city, where everybody lived who lived at all, and died because they could not live there. He came into Wessex two or three times a year for professional reasons; he had arrived from Wintoncester yesterday, and was going on into the next county in a day or two. For one thing he did like the country better than the town, and it was because it contained such girls as herself.

Then the pleasure-machine started again, and, to the light-hearted girl, the figure of the handsome young man, the market-square with its lights and crowd, the houses beyond, and the world at large, began moving round as before, countermoving in the revolving mirrors on her right hand, she being as it were the fixed

point in an undulating, dazzling, lurid universe, in which loomed forward most prominently of all the form of her late interlocutor. Each time that she approached the half of her orbit that lay nearest him they gazed at each other with smiles, and with that unmistakable expression which means so little at the moment, yet so often leads up to passion, heart-ache, union, disunion, devotion, overpopulation, drudgery, content, resignation, despair.

When the horses slowed anew he stepped to her side and proposed another heat. 'Hang the expense for once,' he said. 'I'll pay!'

She laughed till the tears came.

'Why do you laugh, dear?' said he.

'Because—you are so genteel that you must have plenty of money, and only say that for fun!' she returned.

'Ha-ha!' laughed the young man in unison, and gallantly producing his money she was enabled to whirl on again.

As he stood smiling there in the motley crowd, with his pipe in his hand, and clad in the rough pea-jacket and wideawake⁹ that he had put on for his stroll, who would have supposed him to be Charles Bradford Raye, Esquire, stuff-gownsmen,¹ educated at Wintonchester, called to the Bar at Lincoln's-Inn² now going the Western Circuit, merely detained in Melchester by a small arbitration after his brethren had moved on to the next county-town?

Endnotes

- Note 2: Closed yard surrounding a church.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Grassy surface of ground.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Carousels.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Florid ornamentation. "Stoker": man who stokes the furnace powering the "steam circus."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Craftsman who has completed an apprenticeship but not yet attained mastership of his craft or guild.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: In Hardy's Wessex the Salisbury Plain, a large plateau on which stands Stonehenge.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Approximately one dollar.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Soft felt hat.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A junior counsel, who wears a gown of "stuff," or thin wool, rather than silk; qualified to plead cases in court but not appointed to a senior position.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: One of the four London Inns of Court, at which lawyers must be trained to qualify for the bar and to which they afterward must belong to practice law. "Wintoncester": Winchester College, the oldest English public school (the equivalent in the American system of an elite private secondary boarding school).[Return to reference 2](#)

II

The square was overlooked from its remoter corner by the house of which the young girl had spoken, a dignified residence of considerable size, having several windows on each floor. Inside one of these, on the first floor, the apartment being a large drawing-room, sat a lady, in appearance from twenty-eight to thirty years of age. The blinds were still undrawn, and the lady was absently surveying the weird scene without, her cheek resting on her hand. The room was unlit from within, but enough of the glare from the marketplace entered it to reveal the lady's face. She was what is called an interesting creature rather than a handsome woman; dark-eyed, thoughtful, and with sensitive lips.

A man sauntered into the room from behind and came forward.

'O, Edith, I didn't see you,' he said. 'Why are you sitting here in the dark?'

'I am looking at the fair,' replied the lady in a languid voice.

'Oh? Horrid nuisance every year! I wish it could be put a stop to.'

'I like it.'

'H'm. There's no accounting for taste.'

For a moment he gazed from the window with her, for politeness sake, and then went out again.

In a few minutes she rang.

'Hasn't Anna come in?' asked Mrs Harnham.

'No m'm.'

'She ought to be in by this time. I meant her to go for ten minutes only.'

'Shall I go and look for her, m'm?' said the house-maid alertly.

'No. It is not necessary: she is a good girl and will come soon.'

However, when the servant had gone Mrs Harnham arose, went up to her room, cloaked and bonneted herself, and proceeded downstairs, where she found her husband.

'I want to see the fair,' she said; 'and I am going to look for Anna. I have made myself responsible for her, and must see she comes to

no harm. She ought to be indoors. Will you come with me?’

‘Oh, she’s all right. I saw her on one of those whirligig things, talking to her young man as I came in. But I’ll go if you wish, though I’d rather go a hundred miles the other way.’

‘Then please do so. I shall come to no harm alone.’

She left the house and entered the crowd which thronged the market-place, where she soon discovered Anna, seated on the revolving horse. As soon as it stopped Mrs Harnham advanced and said severely, ‘Anna, how can you be such a wild girl? You were only to be out for ten minutes.’

Anna looked blank, and the young man, who had dropped into the background, came to help her alight.

‘Please don’t blame her,’ he said politely. ‘It is my fault that she has stayed. She looked so graceful on the horse that I induced her to go round again. I assure you that she has been quite safe.’

‘In that case I’ll leave her in your hands,’ said Mrs Harnham, turning to retrace her steps.

But this for the moment it was not so easy to do. Something had attracted the crowd to a spot in their rear, and the wine-merchant’s wife, caught by its sway, found herself pressed against Anna’s acquaintance without power to move away. Their faces were within a few inches of each other, his breath fanned her cheek as well as Anna’s. They could do no other than smile at the accident; but neither spoke, and each waited passively. Mrs Harnham then felt a man’s hand clasping her fingers, and from the look of consciousness on the young fellow’s face she knew the hand to be his: she also knew that from the position of the girl he had no other thought than that the imprisoned hand was Anna’s. What prompted her to refrain from undeceiving him she could hardly tell. Not content with holding the hand, he playfully slipped two of his fingers inside her glove, against her palm. Thus matters continued till the pressure lessened; but several minutes passed before the crowd thinned sufficiently to allow Mrs Harnham to withdraw.

‘How did they get to know each other, I wonder?’ she mused as she retreated. ‘Anna is really very forward—and he very wicked and

nice.'

She was so gently stirred with the stranger's manner and voice, with the tenderness of his idle touch, that instead of re-entering the house she turned back again and observed the pair from a screened nook. Really she argued (being little less impulsive than Anna herself) it was very excusable in Anna to encourage him, however she might have contrived to make his acquaintance; he was so gentlemanly, so fascinating, had such beautiful eyes. The thought that he was several years her junior produced a reasonless sigh.

At length the couple turned from the roundabout towards the door of Mrs Harnham's house, and the young man could be heard saying that he would accompany her home. Anna, then, had found a lover, apparently a very devoted one. Mrs Harnham was quite interested in him. When they drew near the door of the wine-merchant's house, a comparatively deserted spot by this time, they stood invisible for a little while in the shadow of a wall, where they separated, Anna going on to the entrance, and her acquaintance returning across the square.

'Anna,' said Mrs Harnham, coming up. 'I've been looking at you! That young man kissed you at parting, I am almost sure.'

'Well,' stammered Anna; 'he said, if I didn't mind—it would do me no harm, and, and, him a great deal of good!'

'Ah, I thought so! And he was a stranger till tonight?'

'Yes ma'am.'

'Yet I warrant you told him your name and everything about yourself?'

'He asked me.'

'But he didn't tell you his?'

'Yes ma'am, he did!' cried Anna victoriously. 'It is Charles Bradford, of London.'

'Well, if he's respectable, of course I've nothing to say against your knowing him,' remarked her mistress, prepossessed, in spite of general principles, in the young man's favour. 'But I must reconsider all that, if he attempts to renew your acquaintance. A country-bred girl like you, who has never lived in Melchester till this month, who

had hardly ever seen a black-coated man till you came here, to be so sharp as to capture a young Londoner like him!’

‘I didn’t capture him. I didn’t do anything,’ said Anna, in confusion.

When she was indoors and alone Mrs Harnham thought what a well-bred and chivalrous young man Anna’s companion had seemed. There had been a magic in his wooing touch of her hand; and she wondered how he had come to be attracted by the girl.

The next morning the emotional Edith Harnham went to the usual weekday service in Melchester cathedral. In crossing the Close through the fog she again perceived him who had interested her the previous evening, gazing up thoughtfully at the high-piled architecture of the nave: and as soon as she had taken her seat he entered and sat down in a stall opposite hers.

He did not particularly heed her; but Mrs Harnham was continually occupying her eyes with him, and wondered more than ever what had attracted him in her unfledged maid-servant. The mistress was almost as unaccustomed as the maiden herself to the end-of-the-age young man, or she might have wondered less. Raye, having looked about him awhile, left abruptly, without regard to the service that was proceeding; and Mrs Harnham—lonely, impressionable creature that she was—took no further interest in praising the Lord. She wished she had married a London man who knew the subtleties of lovemaking as they were evidently known to him who had mistakenly caressed her hand.

III

The calendar at Melchester had been light, occupying the court only a few hours; and the assizes³ at Casterbridge, the next county-town on the Western Circuit, having no business for Raye, he had not gone thither. At the next town after that they did not open till the following Monday, trials to begin on Tuesday morning. In the natural order of things Raye would have arrived at the latter place on Monday afternoon; but it was not till the middle of Wednesday that his gown and grey wig, curled in tiers, in the best fashion of Assyrian bas-reliefs,⁴ were seen blowing and bobbing behind him as he hastily walked up the High Street from his lodgings. But though he entered the assize building there was nothing for him to do, and sitting at the blue baize table in the well of the court, he mended pens with a mind far away from the case in progress. Thoughts of unpremeditated conduct, of which a week earlier he would not have believed himself capable, threw him into a mood of dissatisfied depression.

He had contrived to see again the pretty rural maiden Anna, the day after the fair, had walked out of the city with her to the earthworks⁵ of Old Melchester, and feeling a violent fancy for her, had remained in Melchester all Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday; by persuasion obtaining walks and meetings with the girl six or seven times during the interval; had in brief won her, body and soul.

He supposed it must have been owing to the seclusion in which he had lived of late in town that he had given way so unrestrainedly to a passion for an artless creature whose inexperience had, from the first, led her to place herself unreservedly in his hands. Much he deplored trifling with her feelings for the sake of a passing desire; and he could only hope that she might not live to suffer on his account.

She had begged him to come to her again; entreated him; wept. He had promised that he would do so, and he meant to carry out that promise. He could not desert her now. Awkward as such unintentional connections were, the interspace of a hundred miles—

which to a girl of her limited capabilities was like a thousand—would effectually hinder this summer fancy from greatly encumbering his life; while thought of her simple love might do him the negative good of keeping him from idle pleasures in town when he wished to work hard. His circuit journeys would take him to Melchester three or four times a year; and then he could always see her.

The pseudonym, or rather partial name, that he had given her as his before knowing how far the acquaintance was going to carry him, had been spoken on the spur of the moment, without any ulterior intention whatever. He had not afterwards disturbed Anna's error, but on leaving her he had felt bound to give her an address at a stationer's not far from his chambers, at which she might write to him under the initials 'C. B.'

In due time Raye returned to his London abode, having called at Melchester on his way and spent a few additional hours with his fascinating child of nature. In town he lived monotonously every day. Often he and his rooms were enclosed by a tawny fog from all the world besides, and when he lighted the gas to read or write by, his situation seemed so unnatural that he would look into the fire and think of that trusting girl at Melchester again and again. Often, oppressed by absurd fondness for her, he would enter the dim religious nave of the Law Courts by the north door, elbow other juniors habited like himself, and like him unretained; edge himself into this or that crowded court where a sensational case was going on, just as if he were in it, though the police officers at the door knew as well as he knew himself that he had no more concern with the business in hand than the patient idlers at the gallery-door outside, who had waited to enter since eight in the morning because, like him, they belonged to the classes that live on expectation. But he would do these things to no purpose, and think how greatly the characters in such scenes contrasted with the pink and breezy Anna.

An unexpected feature in that peasant maiden's conduct was that she had not as yet written to him, though he had told her she might do so if she wished. Surely a young creature had never before been

so reticent in such circumstances. At length he sent her a brief line, positively requesting her to write. There was no answer by the return post, but the day after a letter in a neat feminine hand, and bearing the Melchester post-mark, was handed to him by the stationer.

The fact alone of its arrival was sufficient to satisfy his imaginative sentiment. He was not anxious to open the epistle, and in truth did not begin to read it for nearly half-an-hour, anticipating readily its terms of passionate retrospect and tender adjuration. When at last he turned his feet to the fireplace and unfolded the sheet, he was surprised and pleased to find that neither extravagance nor vulgarity was there. It was the most charming little missive he had ever received from woman. To be sure the language was simple and the ideas were slight; but it was so self-possessed; so purely that of a young girl who felt her womanhood to be enough for her dignity that he read it through twice. Four sides were filled, and a few lines written across, after the fashion of former days; the paper, too, was common, and not of the latest shade and surface. But what of those things? He had received letters from women who were fairly called ladies, but never so sensible, so human a letter as this. He could not single out any one sentence and say it was at all remarkable or clever; the *ensemble* of the letter it was which won him; and beyond the one request that he would write or come to her again soon there was nothing to show her sense of a claim upon him.

To write again and develop a correspondence was the last thing Raye would have preconceived as his conduct in such a situation; yet he did send a short, encouraging line or two, signed with his pseudonym, in which he asked for another letter, and cheerfully promised that he would try to see her again on some near day, and would never forget how much they had been to each other during their short acquaintance.

Endnotes

- Note 3: Sessions of the superior court. "Calendar": list of cases to be tried.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sculptural style in which the form that projects from the surrounding surface is low and flat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Banks of earth constructed as fortifications in ancient times.[Return to reference 5](#)

IV

To return now to the moment at which Anna, at Melchester, had received Raye's letter.

It had been put into her own hand by the postman on his morning rounds. She flushed down to her neck on receipt of it, and turned it over and over. 'It is mine?' she said.

'Why, yes, can't you see it is?' said the postman, smiling as he guessed the nature of the document and the cause of the confusion.

'O yes, of course!' replied Anna, looking at the letter, forcedly tittering, and blushing still more.

Her look of embarrassment did not leave her with the postman's departure. She opened the envelope, kissed its contents, put away the letter in her pocket, and remained musing till her eyes filled with tears.

A few minutes later she carried up a cup of tea to Mrs Harnham in her bedchamber. Anna's mistress looked at her, and said: 'How dismal you seem this morning, Anna. What's the matter?'

'I'm not dismal, I'm glad; only I—' She stopped to stifle a sob.

'Well?'

'I've got a letter—and what good is it to me, if I can't read a word in it!'

'Why, I'll read it, child, if necessary.'

'But this is from somebody—I don't want anybody to read it but myself!' Anna murmured.

'I shall not tell anybody. Is it from that young man?'

'I think so.' Anna slowly produced the letter, saying: 'Then will you read it to me, ma'am?'

This was the secret of Anna's embarrassment and flutterings. She could neither read nor write. She had grown up under the care of an aunt by marriage, at one of the lonely hamlets on the Great Mid-Wessex Plain where, even in days of national education, there had been no school within a distance of two miles. Her aunt was an ignorant woman; there had been nobody to investigate Anna's

circumstances, nobody to care about her learning the rudiments; though, as often in such cases, she had been well fed and clothed and not unkindly treated. Since she had come to live at Melchester with Mrs Harnham, the latter, who took a kindly interest in the girl, had taught her to speak correctly, in which accomplishment Anna showed considerable readiness, as is not unusual with the illiterate; and soon became quite fluent in the use of her mistress's phraseology. Mrs Harnham also insisted upon her getting a spelling and copy book, and beginning to practise in these. Anna was slower in this branch of her education, and meanwhile here was the letter.

Edith Harnham's large dark eyes expressed some interest in the contents, though, in her character of mere interpreter, she threw into her tone as much as she could of mechanical passiveness. She read the short epistle on to its concluding sentence, which idly requested Anna to send him a tender answer.

'Now—you'll do it for me, won't you, dear mistress?' said Anna eagerly. 'And you'll do it as well as ever you can, please? Because I couldn't bear him to think I am not able to do it myself. I should sink into the earth with shame if he knew that!'

From some words in the letter Mrs Harnham was led to ask questions, and the answers she received confirmed her suspicions. Deep concern filled Edith's heart at perceiving how the girl had committed her happiness to the issue of this new-sprung attachment. She blamed herself for not interfering in a flirtation which had resulted so seriously for the poor little creature in her charge; though at the time of seeing the pair together she had a feeling that it was hardly within her province to nip young affection in the bud. However, what was done could not be undone, and it behoved her now, as Anna's only protector, to help her as much as she could. To Anna's eager request that she, Mrs Harnham, should compose and write the answer to this young London man's letter, she felt bound to accede, to keep alive his attachment to the girl if possible; though in other circumstances she might have suggested the cook as an amanuensis.⁶

A tender reply was thereupon concocted, and set down in Edith Harnham's hand. This letter it had been which Raye had received and delighted in. Written in the presence of Anna it certainly was, and on Anna's humble notepaper, and in a measure indited by the young girl; but the life, the spirit, the individuality, were Edith Harnham's.

'Won't you at least put your name yourself?' she said. 'You can manage to write that by this time?'

'No, no,' said Anna, shrinking back. 'I should do it so bad. He'd be ashamed of me, and never see me again!'

The note, so prettily requesting another from him, had, as we have seen, power enough in its pages to bring one. He declared it to be such a pleasure to hear from her that she must write every week. The same process of manufacture was accordingly repeated by Anna and her mistress, and continued for several weeks in succession; each letter being penned and suggested by Edith, the girl standing by; the answer read and commented on by Edith, Anna standing by and listening again.

Late on a winter evening, after the dispatch of the sixth letter, Mrs Harnham was sitting alone by the remains of her fire. Her husband had retired to bed, and she had fallen into that fixity of musing which takes no count of hour or temperature. The state of mind had been brought about in Edith by a strange thing which she had done that day. For the first time since Raye's visit Anna had gone to stay over a night or two with her cottage friends on the Plain, and in her absence had arrived, out of its time, a letter from Raye. To this Edith had replied on her own responsibility, from the depths of her own heart, without waiting for her maid's collaboration. The luxury of writing to him what would be known to no consciousness but his was great, and she had indulged herself therein.

Why was it a luxury?

Edith Harnham led a lonely life. Influenced by the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood with its interests, dignity, and leisure, she had

consented to marry the elderly wine-merchant as a *pis aller*,⁷ at the age of seven-and-twenty—some three years before this date—to find afterwards that she had made a mistake. That contract had left her still a woman whose deeper nature had never been stirred.

She was now clearly realising that she had become possessed to the bottom of her soul with the image of a man to whom she was hardly so much as a name. From the first he had attracted her by his looks and voice; by his tender touch; and, with these as generators, the writing of letter after letter and the reading of their soft answers had insensibly developed on her side an emotion which fanned his; till there had resulted a magnetic reciprocity between the correspondents, notwithstanding that one of them wrote in a character not her own. That he had been able to seduce another woman in two days was his crowning though unrecognised fascination for her as the she-animal.

They were her own impassioned and pent-up ideas—lowered to monosyllabic phraseology in order to keep up the disguise—that Edith put into letters signed with another name, much to the shallow Anna's delight, who, unassisted, could not for the world have conceived such pretty fancies for winning him, even had she been able to write them. Edith found that it was these, her own foisted-in sentiments, to which the young barrister mainly responded. The few sentences occasionally added from Anna's own lips made apparently no impression upon him.

The letter-writing in her absence Anna never discovered; but on her return the next morning she declared she wished to see her lover about something at once, and begged Mrs Harnham to ask him to come.

There was a strange anxiety in her manner which did not escape Mrs Harnham, and ultimately resolved itself into a flood of tears. Sinking down at Edith's knees, she made confession that the result of her relations with her lover it would soon become necessary to disclose.

Edith Harnham was generous enough to be very far from inclined to cast Anna adrift at this conjuncture. No true woman ever is so

inclined from her own personal point of view, however prompt she may be in taking such steps to safeguard those dear to her. Although she had written to Raye so short a time previously, she instantly penned another Anna-note hinting clearly though delicately the state of affairs.

Raye replied by a hasty line to say how much he was concerned at her news: he felt that he must run down to see her almost immediately.

But a week later the girl came to her mistress's room with another note, which on being read informed her that after all he could not find time for the journey. Anna was broken with grief; but by Mrs Harnham's counsel strictly refrained from hurling at him the reproaches and bitterness customary from young women so situated. One thing was imperative: to keep the young man's romantic interest in her alive. Rather therefore did Edith, in the name of her *protégée*, request him on no account to be distressed about the looming event, and not to inconvenience himself to hasten down. She desired above everything to be no weight upon him in his career, no clog upon his high activities. She had wished him to know what had befallen: he was to dismiss it again from his mind. Only he must write tenderly as ever, and when he should come again on the spring circuit it would be soon enough to discuss what had better be done.

It may well be supposed that Anna's own feelings had not been quite in accord with these generous expressions; but the mistress's judgment had ruled, and Anna had acquiesced. 'All I want is that *niceness* you can so well put into your letters, my dear, dear mistress, and that I can't for the life o' me make up out of my own head; though I mean the same thing and feel it exactly when you've written it down!'

When the letter had been sent off, and Edith Harnham was left alone, she bowed herself on the back of her chair and wept.

'I wish his child was mine—I wish it was!' she murmured. 'Yet how can I say such a wicked thing!'

Endnotes

- Note 6: Secretary.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Last resort (French).[Return to reference 7](#)

V

The letter moved Raye considerably when it reached him. The intelligence itself had affected him less than her unexpected manner of treating him in relation to it. The absence of any word of reproach, the devotion to his interests, the self-sacrifice apparent in every line, all made up a nobility of character that he had never dreamt of finding in womankind.

'God forgive me!' he said tremulously. 'I have been a wicked wretch. I did not know she was such a treasure as this!'

He reassured her instantly; declaring that he would not of course desert her, that he would provide a home for her somewhere. Meanwhile she was to stay where she was as long as her mistress would allow her.

But a misfortune supervened in this direction. Whether an inkling of Anna's circumstances reached the knowledge of Mrs Harnham's husband or not cannot be said, but the girl was compelled, in spite of Edith's entreaties, to leave the house. By her own choice she decided to go back for a while to the cottage on the Plain. This arrangement led to a consultation as to how the correspondence should be carried on; and in the girl's inability to continue personally what had been begun in her name, and in the difficulty of their acting in concert as heretofore, she requested Mrs Harnham—the only well-to-do friend she had in the world—to receive the letters and reply to them off-hand, sending them on afterwards to herself on the Plain, where she might at least get some neighbour to read them to her, if a trustworthy one could be met with. Anna and her box then departed for the Plain.

Thus it befell that Edith Harnham found herself in the strange position of having to correspond, under no supervision by the real woman, with a man not her husband, in terms which were virtually those of a wife, concerning a corporeal condition that was not Edith's at all; the man being one for whom, mainly through the sympathies involved in playing this part, she secretly cherished a predilection, subtle and imaginative truly, but strong and absorbing. She opened

each letter, read it as if intended for herself, and replied from the promptings of her own heart and no other.

Throughout this correspondence, carried on in the girl's absence, the high-strung Edith Harnham lived in the ecstasy of fancy; the vicarious intimacy engendered such a flow of passionateness as was never exceeded. For conscience' sake Edith at first sent on each of his letters to Anna, and even rough copies of her replies; but later on these so-called copies were much abridged, and many letters on both sides were not sent on at all.

Though sensuous, and, superficially at least, infested with the self-indulgent vices of artificial society, there was a substratum of honesty and fairness in Raye's character. He had really a tender regard for the country girl, and it grew more tender than ever when he found her apparently capable of expressing the deepest sensibilities in the simplest words. He meditated, he wavered; and finally resolved to consult his sister, a maiden lady much older than himself, of lively sympathies and good intent. In making this confidence he showed her some of the letters.

'She seems fairly educated,' Miss Raye observed. 'And bright in ideas. She expresses herself with a taste that must be innate.'

'Yes. She writes very prettily, doesn't she, thanks to these elementary schools?'

'One is drawn out towards her, in spite of one's self, poor thing.'

The upshot of the discussion was that though he had not been directly advised to do it, Raye wrote, in his real name, what he would never have decided to write on his own responsibility; namely that he could not live without her, and would come down in the spring and shelve her looming difficulty by marrying her.

This bold acceptance of the situation was made known to Anna by Mrs Harnham driving out immediately to the cottage on the Plain. Anna jumped for joy like a little child. And poor, crude directions for answering appropriately were given to Edith Harnham, who on her return to the city carried them out with warm intensifications.

'O!' she groaned, as she threw down the pen. 'Anna—poor good little fool—hasn't intelligence enough to appreciate him! How should

she? While I—don't bear his child!

It was now February. The correspondence had continued altogether for four months; and the next letter from Raye contained incidentally a statement of his position and prospects. He said that in offering to wed her he had, at first, contemplated the step of retiring from a profession which hitherto had brought him very slight emolument, and which, to speak plainly, he had thought might be difficult of practice after his union with her. But the unexpected mines of brightness and warmth that her letters had disclosed to be lurking in her sweet nature had led him to abandon that somewhat sad prospect. He felt sure that, with her powers of development, after a little private training in the social forms of London under his supervision, and a little help from a governess if necessary, she would make as good a professional man's wife as could be desired, even if he should rise to the woolsack.⁸ Many a Lord Chancellor's wife had been less intuitively a lady than she had shown herself to be in her lines to him.

'O—poor fellow, poor fellow!' mourned Edith Harnham.

Her distress now raged as high as her infatuation. It was she who had wrought him to this pitch—to a marriage which meant his ruin; yet she could not, in mercy to her maid, do anything to hinder his plan. Anna was coming to Melchester that week, but she could hardly show the girl this last reply from the young man; it told too much of the second individuality that had usurped the place of the first.

Anna came, and her mistress took her into her own room for privacy. Anna began by saying with some anxiety that she was glad the wedding was so near.

'O Anna!' replied Mrs Harnham. 'I think we must tell him all—that I have been doing your writing for you?—lest he should not know it till after you become his wife, and it might lead to dissension and recriminations—'

'O mis'ess, dear mis'ess—please don't tell him now!' cried Anna in distress. 'If you were to do it, perhaps he would not marry me; and what should I do then? It would be terrible what would come to me!

And I am getting on with my writing, too. I have brought with me the copybook you were so good as to give me, and I practise every day, and though it is so, so hard, I shall do it well at last, I believe, if I keep on trying.'

Edith looked at the copybook. The copies had been set by herself, and such progress as the girl had made was in the way of grotesque facsimile of her mistress's hand. But even if Edith's flowing calligraphy were reproduced the inspiration would be another thing.

'You do it so beautifully,' continued Anna, 'and say all that I want to say so much better than I could say it, that I do hope you won't leave me in the lurch just now!'

'Very well,' replied the other. 'But I—but I thought I ought not to go on!'

'Why?'

Her strong desire to confide her sentiments led Edith to answer truly:

'Because of its effect upon me.'

'But it *can't* have any!'

'Why, child?'

'Because you are married already!' said Anna with lucid simplicity.

'Of course it can't,' said her mistress hastily; yet glad, despite her conscience, that two or three out-pourings still remained to her. 'But you must concentrate your attention on writing your name as I write it here.'

Endnotes

- Note 8: Seat of the Lord Chancellor in the House of Lords, formerly made of a sack of wool. [Return to reference 8](#)

VI

Soon Raye wrote about the wedding. Having decided to make the best of what he feared was a piece of romantic folly, he had acquired more zest for the grand experiment. He wished the ceremony to be in London, for greater privacy. Edith Harnham would have preferred it at Melchester; Anna was passive. His reasoning prevailed, and Mrs Harnham threw herself with mournful zeal into the preparations for Anna's departure. In a last desperate feeling that she must at every hazard be in at the death of her dream, and see once again the man who by a species of telepathy had exercised such an influence on her, she offered to go up with Anna and be with her through the ceremony—'to see the end of her,' as her mistress put it with forced gaiety; an offer which the girl gratefully accepted; for she had no other friend capable of playing the part of companion and witness, in the presence of a gentlemanly bridegroom, in such a way as not to hasten an opinion that he had made an irremediable social blunder.

It was a muddy morning in March when Raye alighted from a four-wheel cab at the door of a registry-office in the S.W. district of London, and carefully handed down Anna and her companion Mrs Harnham. Anna looked attractive in the somewhat fashionable clothes which Mrs Harnham had helped her to buy, though not quite so attractive as, an innocent child, she had appeared in her country gown on the back of the wooden horse at Melchester Fair.

Mrs Harnham had come up this morning by an early train, and a young man—a friend of Raye's—having met them at the door, all four entered the registry-office together. Till an hour before this time Raye had never known the wine-merchant's wife, except at that first casual encounter, and in the flutter of the performance before them he had little opportunity for more than a brief acquaintance. The contract of marriage at a registry is soon got through; but somehow, during its progress, Raye discovered a strange and secret gravitation between himself and Anna's friend.

The formalities of the wedding—or rather ratification of a previous union—being concluded, the four went in one cab to Raye's lodgings, newly taken in a new suburb in preference to a house, the rent of which he could ill afford just then. Here Anna cut the little cake which Raye had bought at a pastry-cook's on his way home from Lincoln's Inn the night before. But she did not do much besides. Raye's friend was obliged to depart almost immediately, and when he had left the only ones virtually present were Edith and Raye, who exchanged ideas with much animation. The conversation was indeed theirs only, Anna being as a domestic animal who humbly heard but understood not. Raye seemed startled in awakening to this fact, and began to feel dissatisfied with her inadequacy.

At last, more disappointed than he cared to own, he said, 'Mrs Harnham, my darling is so flurried that she doesn't know what she is doing or saying. I see that after this event a little quietude will be necessary before she gives tongue to that tender philosophy which she used to treat me to in her letters.'

They had planned to start early that afternoon for Knollsea, to spend the few opening days of their married life there, and as the hour for departure was drawing near Raye asked his wife if she would go to the writing-desk in the next room and scribble a little note to his sister, who had been unable to attend through indisposition, informing her that the ceremony was over, thanking her for her little present, and hoping to know her well now that she was the writer's sister as well as Charles's.

'Say it in the pretty poetical way you know so well how to adopt,' he added, 'for I want you particularly to win her, and both of you to be dear friends.'

Anna looked uneasy, but departed to her task, Raye remaining to talk to their guest. Anna was a long while absent, and her husband suddenly rose and went to her.

He found her still bending over the writing-table, with tears brimming up in her eyes; and he looked down upon the sheet of note-paper with some interest, to discover with what tact she had

expressed her good-will in the delicate circumstances. To his surprise she had progressed but a few lines, in the characters and spelling of a child of eight, and with the ideas of a goose.

'Anna,' he said, staring; 'what's this?'

'It only means—that I can't do it any better!' she answered, through her tears.

'Eh? Nonsense!'

'I can't!' she insisted, with miserable, sobbing hardihood. 'I—I—didn't write those letters, Charles! I only told *her* what to write! And not always that! But I am learning, O so fast, my dear, dear husband! And you'll forgive me, won't you, for not telling you before?' She slid to her knees, abjectly clasped his waist and laid her face against him.

He stood a few moments, raised her, abruptly turned, and shut the door upon her, rejoining Edith in the drawing-room. She saw that something untoward had been discovered, and their eyes remained fixed on each other.

'Do I guess rightly?' he asked, with wan quietude. '*You* were her scribe through all this?'

'It was necessary,' said Edith.

'Did she dictate every word you ever wrote to me?'

'Not every word.'

'In fact, very little?'

'Very little.'

'You wrote a great part of those pages every week from your own conceptions, though in her name!'

'Yes.'

'Perhaps you wrote many of the letters when you were alone, without communication with her?'

'I did.'

He turned to the bookcase, and leant with his hand over his face; and Edith, seeing his distress, became white as a sheet.

'You have deceived me—ruined me!' he murmured.

'O, don't say it!' she cried in her anguish, jumping up and putting her hand on his shoulder. 'I can't bear that!'

'Delighting me deceptively! Why did you do it—*why* did you!'

'I began doing it in kindness to her! How could I do otherwise than try to save such a simple girl from misery? But I admit that I continued it for pleasure to myself.'

Raye looked up. 'Why did it give you pleasure?' he asked.

'I must not tell,' said she.

He continued to regard her, and saw that her lips suddenly began to quiver under his scrutiny, and her eyes to fill and droop. She started aside, and said that she must go to the station to catch the return train: could a cab be called immediately?

But Raye went up to her, and took her unresisting hand. 'Well, to think of such a thing as this!' he said. 'Why, you and I are friends—lovers—devoted lovers—by correspondence!'

'Yes; I suppose.'

'More.'

'More?'

'Plainly more. It is no use blinking that. Legally I have married her—God help us both!—in soul and spirit I have married you, and no other woman in the world!'

'Hush!'

'But I will not hush! Why should you try to disguise the full truth, when you have already owned half of it? Yes, it is between you and me that the bond is—not between me and her! Now I'll say no more. But, O my cruel one, I think I have one claim upon you!'

She did not say what, and he drew her towards him, and bent over her. 'If it was all pure invention in those letters,' he said emphatically, 'give me your cheek only. If you meant what you said, let it be lips. It is for the first and last time, remember!'

She put up her mouth, and he kissed her long. 'You forgive me?' she said, crying.

'Yes.'

'But you are ruined!'

'What matter!' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'It serves me right!'

She withdrew, wiped her eyes, entered and bade good-bye to Anna, who had not expected her to go so soon, and was still wrestling with the letter. Raye followed Edith downstairs, and in three minutes she was in a hansom⁹ driving to the Waterloo station.

He went back to his wife. 'Never mind the letter, Anna, to-day,' he said gently. 'Put on your things. We, too, must be off shortly.'

The simple girl, upheld by the sense that she was indeed married, showed her delight at finding that he was as kind as ever after the disclosure. She did not know that before his eyes he beheld as it were a galley, in which he, the fastidious urban, was chained to work for the remainder of his life, with her, the unlettered peasant, chained to his side.

Edith travelled back to Melchester that day with a face that showed the very stupor of grief, her lips still tingling from the desperate pressure of his kiss. The end of her impassioned dream had come. When at dusk she reached the Melchester station her husband was there to meet her, but in his perfunctoriness and her preoccupation they did not see each other, and she went out of the station alone.

She walked mechanically homewards without calling a fly.¹ Entering, she could not bear the silence of the house, and went up in the dark to where Anna had slept, where she remained thinking awhile. She then returned to the drawing-room, and not knowing what she did, crouched down upon the floor.

'I have ruined him!' she kept repeating. 'I have ruined him; because I would not deal treacherously towards her!'

In the course of half an hour a figure opened the door of the apartment.

'Ah—who's that?' she said, starting up, for it was dark.

'Your husband—who should it be?' said the worthy merchant.

'Ah—my husband!—I forgot I had a husband!' she whispered to herself.

'I missed you at the station,' he continued. 'Did you see Anna safely tied up? I hope so, for 'twas time.'

'Yes—Anna is married.'

Simultaneously with Edith's journey home Anna and her husband were sitting at the opposite windows of a second-class carriage which sped along to Knollsea. In his hand was a pocket-book full of creased sheets closely written over. Unfolding them one after another he read them in silence, and sighed.

'What are you doing, dear Charles?' she said timidly from the other window, and drew nearer to him as if he were a god.

'Reading over all those sweet letters to me signed "Anna," ' he replied with dreary resignation.

1891

Endnotes

- Note 9: A horse-drawn carriage with two wheels.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Carriage.[Return to reference 1](#)

Hap¹

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: 'Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!'

5 Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

10 But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters² had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

18661898

Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, chance (as also "Casualty," line 11).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Half-blind judges.[Return to reference 2](#)

Neutral Tones

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of ° God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
—They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

5 Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

10 The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing . . .

15 Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

18671898

Notes

- °: rebuked by [Return to reference °](#)

Drummer Hodge

1
They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
Uncoffined—just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
That breaks the veldt¹ around;
5 And foreign constellations² west^o
Each night above his mound.

2
Young Hodge the Drummer never knew—
Fresh from his Wessex home—
The meaning of the broad Karoo,³
10 The Bush,⁴ the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
Strange stars amid the gloam.

3
Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
15 Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.

1899, 1901

Endnotes

- Note 1: South African Dutch (Afrikaans) word for a plain or prairie. "Kopje-crest": small hill (Afrikaans). The poem is a

lament for an English soldier killed in the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Those visible only in the Southern Hemisphere.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A dry tableland region in South Africa (usually spelled “Karoo”).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: British colonial word for an uncleared area of land.[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *set*[Return to reference °](#)

The Darkling¹ Thrush

I leant upon a coppice gate²
 When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.
5 The tangled bine-stems³ scored the sky
 Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh^o
 Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,⁴
10 His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
15 Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
 The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
 Of joy illimited;
20 An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
 In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
 Upon the growing gloom.

25 So little cause for carolings
 Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
 Afar or nigh around,

That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

1900, 1901

Endnotes

- Note 1: In the dark.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Gate leading to a small wood or thicket.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Twining stems of shrubs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Leaning out (of its coffin); that is, the 19th century was dead. This poem was dated December 31, 1900.[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *near* [Return to reference °](#)

The Ruined Maid

'O 'Melia,¹ my dear, this does everything crown!
Who could have supposed I should meet you in
Town?
And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?'—
'O didn't you know I'd been ruined?' said she.

5 —'You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;²
And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers
three!'—
'Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined,' said
she.

—'At home in the barton^o you said "thee" and
"thou",
10 And "thik oon", and "theäs oon", and "t'other"; but
now
Your talking quite fits 'ee^o for high compa-ny!'—
'Some polish is gained with one's ruin,' said she.

—'Your hands were like paws then, your face blue
and bleak
But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,
And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!'—
15 'We never do work when we're ruined,' said she.

—'You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock;^o but at present you
seem
To know not of megrims^o or melancho-ly!'—
'True. One's pretty lively when ruined,' said she.

—‘I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!’—
‘My dear—a raw country girl, such as you be,
Cannot quite expect that. You ain’t ruined,’ said she.

18661901

Endnotes

- Note 1: Diminutive form of Amelia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Digging up a species of thick-rooted weed.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *farmyard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *thee*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sigh*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *low spirits*[Return to reference °](#)

Channel Firing¹

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel² window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgement-day

5 And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumb,
The worms drew back into the mounds,

10 The glebe cow³ drooled. Till God called, 'No;
It's gunnery practise out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

15 'All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters⁴
They do no more for Christ's⁵ sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

20 'That this is not the judgement-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening. . . .

'Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need).'

So down we lay again. 'I wonder,

25 Will the world ever saner be,
Said one, 'than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!'

30 And many a skeleton shook his head.
'Instead of preaching forty year,'
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
'I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.'

35 Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.⁶

19141914

Endnotes

- Note 1: Written in April 1914, when Anglo-German naval rivalry was growing steadily more acute; the title refers to gunnery practice in the English Channel. Four months later (August 4), World War I broke out.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Part of church nearest to the altar.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, cow on a small plot of land belonging to a church (a "glebe" is a small field).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See the Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The archaic spelling and pronunciation suggest a ballad note of doom.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The sound of guns preparing for war across the Channel reaches Alfred's ("Stourton") Tower (near Stourton in Dorset), commemorating King Alfred's defeat of a Danish invasion in 878; also the site of King Arthur's court at Camelot (supposedly near Glastonbury) and the famous prehistoric stone circle of Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.[Return to reference 6](#)

The Convergence of the Twain

*(Lines on the loss of the Titanic)*¹

1

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches
she.

2

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine² fires,
5 Cold currents thrid,³ and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

3

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls—grotesque, slimed, dumb,
indifferent.

4

Jewels in joy designed
10 To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and
blind.

5

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear

15 And query: 'What does this vaingloriousness down
here?' . . . section#6.doc-section

6

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will⁴ that stirs and urges everything

7

Prepared a sinister mate
For her—so gaily great—
20 A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

8

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

9

25 Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

10

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
30 On being anon^o twin halves of one august^o event,

11

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said 'Now!' And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two
hemispheres.

19121912, 1914

Endnotes

- Note 1: The *Titanic* was the largest and most luxurious ocean liner of the day. Considered unsinkable, it sank with great loss of life on April 15, 1912, on the ship's maiden voyage, from Southampton to the United States, after colliding with an iceberg. "Twain": two.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, destructive. The salamander was supposed to be able to survive fire.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A variant form of the verb *thread*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The force (blind, but slowly gaining consciousness throughout history) that drives the world, according to Hardy's philosophy.[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *soon* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *important*[Return to reference °](#)

Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?

'Ah, are you digging on my grave
My loved one?—planting rue?'¹
—'No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
5 'It cannot hurt her now,' he said,
"That I should not be true." '

'Then who is digging on my grave?
My nearest dearest kin?'
—'Ah, no; they sit and think, "What use!
10 What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
Her spirit from Death's gin." '°

'But some one digs upon my grave?
My enemy?—prodding sly?'
—'Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
15 That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
And cares not where you lie.'

'Then, who is digging on my grave?
Say—since I have not guessed!'
20 —'O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?'

25 'Ah, yes! *You* dig upon my grave . . .
Why flashed it not on me
That one true heart was left behind!

What feeling do we ever find
To equal among human kind
A dog's fidelity!

30

'Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
It was your resting-place.'

35

1914

Endnotes

- Note 1: A yellow-flowered herb, traditionally an emblem of sorrow (*rue* is also an archaic word for "sorrow").[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *trap*[Return to reference °](#)

Under the Waterfall

'Whenever I plunge my arm, like this,
In a basin of water, I never miss
The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day
Fetched back from its thickening shroud of gray.
5 Hence the only prime
 And real love-rhyme
 That I know by heart,
 And that leaves no smart,
Is the purl^o of a little valley fall
About three spans wide and two spans tall
10 Over a table of solid rock,
 And into a scoop of the self-same block;
 The purl of a runlet that never ceases
 In stir of kingdoms, in wars, in peaces;
 With a hollow boiling voice it speaks
15 And has spoken since hills were turfless peaks.'

'And why gives this the only prime
Idea to you of a real love-rhyme?
And why does plunging your arm in a bowl
Full of spring water, bring throbs to your soul?'
20

'Well, under the fall, in a crease of the stone,
Though where precisely none ever has known,
Jammed darkly, nothing to show how prized,
And by now with its smoothness opalized,
25 Is a drinking-glass:
 For, down that pass
 My lover and I
 Walked under a sky
Of blue with a leaf-wove awning of green,

30 In the burn of August, to paint the scene,
And we placed our basket of fruit and wine
By the runlet's rim, where we sat to dine;
And when we had drunk from the glass together,
Arched by the oak-copse from the weather,
I held the vessel to rinse in the fall,
35 Where it slipped, and sank, and was past recall,
Though we stooped and plumbed the little abyss
With long bared arms. There the glass still is.
And, as said, if I thrust my arm below
Cold water in basin or bowl, a throe^o
40 From the past awakens a sense of that time,
And the glass we used, and the cascade's rhyme.
The basin seems the pool, and its edge
The hard smooth face of the brook-side ledge,
And the leafy pattern of china-ware
45 The hanging plants that were bathing there.

'By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
There lies intact that chalice of ours,
And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
Persistently sung by the fall above.
50 No lip has touched it since his and mine
In turns therefrom sipped lovers' wine.'

1914

Notes

- ^o: rippling flow [Return to reference ^o](#)
- ^o: violent pang [Return to reference ^o](#)

The Walk

You did not walk with me
Of late to the hill-top tree
 By the gated ways,
 As in earlier days;
 You were weak and lame,
5 So you never came,
And I went alone, and I did not mind,
Not thinking of you as left behind.

I walked up there to-day
Just in the former way:
10 Surveyed around
 The familiar ground
 By myself again:
 What difference, then?
15 Only that underlying sense
 Of the look of a room on returning thence.

1912–131914

The Voice

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to
me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to
me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

5 Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you
then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

10 Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
Travelling across the wet mead^o to me here,
You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,^o
Heard no more again far or near?

15 Thus I; faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,^o
And the woman calling.

Dec. 19121914

Notes

- °: *meadow*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *inattention*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *northward*[Return to reference °](#)

During Wind and Rain

They sing their dearest songs—
He, she, all of them—yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
And one to play;
5 With the candles mooning^o each face. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss—
Elders and juniors—aye,
10 Making the pathways neat
And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across.

They are blithely breakfasting all—
15 Men and maidens—yea,
Under the summer tree,
With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
20 And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them—aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
25 On the lawn all day,
And brightest things that are theirs. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

Notes

- °: *lighting*[Return to reference](#) °

In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'^{[1](#)}

1

Only a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk.

2

5 Only thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
Though Dynasties pass.

3

10 Yonder a maid and her wight[°]
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.

19151916, 1917

Endnotes

- Note 1: See "Thou art my battle axe and weapon of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations" (Jeremiah 51:20). The poem was written during World War I. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *man* [Return to reference °](#)

He Never Expected Much

[*or*]

A CONSIDERATION

(A reflection) On my Eighty-Sixth Birthday

Well, World, you have kept faith with me,
Kept faith with me;
Upon the whole you have proved to be
Much as you said you were.
5 Since as a child I used to lie
Upon the leaze^o and watch the sky,
Never, I own, expected I
That life would all be fair.

'Twas then you said, and since have said,
Times since have said,
10 In that mysterious voice you shed
From clouds and hills around:
'Many have loved me desperately,
Many with smooth serenity,
While some have shown contempt of me
15 Till they dropped underground.

'I do not promise overmuch,
Child; overmuch;
Just neutral-tinted haps^o and such,'
You said to minds like mine.
20 Wise warning for your credit's sake!
Which I for one failed not to take,
And hence could stem such strain and ache
As each year might assign.

19261928

Notes

- °: *pasture*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *happenings*[Return to reference °](#)

JOSEPH CONRAD

1857–1924

Joseph Conrad was born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in Poland (then under Russian rule), son of a Polish patriot who suffered exile in Russia for his Polish nationalist activities and died in 1869, leaving Conrad to be brought up by a maternal uncle. At the age of fifteen he amazed his family and friends by announcing his passionate desire to go to sea; he was eventually allowed to go to Marseilles, France, in 1874, and from there he made a number of voyages on French merchant ships to Martinique and other islands in the Caribbean. In 1878 he signed on an English ship that brought him to the east coast English port of Lowestoft, where (still as an ordinary seaman) he joined the crew of a small coasting vessel plying between Lowestoft and Newcastle. In six voyages between these two ports he learned English. Thus launched on a career in the British merchant service, Conrad sailed on a variety of British ships to East Asia, Australia, India, South America, and Africa, eventually gaining his master's certificate in 1886, the year he became a naturalized British subject. He received his first command in 1888, and in 1890 took a steamboat up the Congo River in nightmarish circumstances (described in *Heart of Darkness*, 1899) that permanently afflicted his health and his imagination.

In the early 1890s he was already thinking of turning some of his Malayan experiences into English fiction, and in 1892–93, when serving as first mate on the *Torrens* sailing from London to Adelaide,

he revealed to a sympathetic passenger that he had begun a novel (*Almayer's Folly*), while on the return journey he impressed the young novelist John Galsworthy, who was on board, with his conversation. Conrad found it difficult to obtain a command, and this disappointment, together with the interest aroused by *Almayer's Folly* when it was published in 1895, helped turn him away from the sea to a career as a writer. He settled in London and in 1896 married an Englishwoman. This son of a Polish patriot turned merchant seaman turned writer was henceforth—after twenty years at sea—an English novelist.

In his travels through the Asian, African, and Caribbean landscapes that eventually made their way into his fiction, Conrad witnessed at close range the workings of European empires, including the British, French, Belgian, Dutch, and German, that at the time controlled most of the earth's surface and were extracting from it vast quantities of raw materials and profiting from forced or cheap labor. In the essay "Geography and Some Explorers," Conrad describes the imperial exploitation he observed in Africa as "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration." What he saw of the uses and abuses of imperial power helped make him deeply skeptical. Marlow, the intermediate narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, reflects: "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it. . . ." And yet in this novella, the ideas at the back of colonialism's ruthless greed and violence are hardly shown to redeem anything at all.

Conrad's questioning of the ethics of empire, perhaps harkening back to his childhood experience as a Pole under Russian occupation, is part of his many-faceted exploration of the ethical ambiguities in human experience. In his great novel *Lord Jim* (1900), which like *Heart of Darkness* uses the device of an intermediate narrator (again, it is Marlow), he probes the meaning of a gross failure of duty on the part of a romantic and idealistic young sailor,

and by presenting the hero's history from a series of different points of view, he sustains the ethical questioning to the end. By deploying intermediate narrators and multiple points of view in his fiction, Conrad suggests the complexity of experience and the difficulty of judging human actions.

Although Conrad's plots and exotic settings recall imperial romance and Victorian tales of adventure, he helped develop modern narrative strategies—frame narration, fragmented perspective, flashbacks and flash-forwards, psychologically laden symbolism—that disrupt chronology, render meaning indeterminate, reveal unconscious drives, blur boundaries between civilization and barbarism, and radically cast in doubt epistemological and ethical certainties. Another indication of Conrad's modernist proclivities is the alienation of his characters. Many of his works expose the difficulty of true communion, while also paradoxically exposing how communication is sometimes unexpectedly forced on us, often with someone who may be on the surface our moral opposite, so that we are compelled into a mysterious recognition of our opposite as our true self. Other stories and novels—and Conrad wrote prolifically despite his late start—explore the ways in which the codes we live by are tested in moments of crisis, revealing either their inadequacy or our own. Imagination can corrupt (as with Lord Jim) or save (as in *The Shadow-Line*, 1917), and a total lack of it can either see a person through (Captain MacWhirr in *Typhoon*, 1902) or render a person comically ridiculous (Captain Mitchell in *Nostromo*, 1904). Set in an imaginary Latin American republic, *Nostromo* subtly studies the corrupting effects of politics and "material interests" on personal relationships. Conrad wrote two other political novels—*The Secret Agent* (1906) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). The latter is a story of Dostoyevskian power about a Russian student who becomes involuntarily associated with anti-government violence in czarist Russia and is maneuvered by circumstances into a position where, although a government spy, he has to pretend to be a revolutionary among revolutionaries. Having to pretend consistently to be the opposite of what he is, this character, like others in Conrad's fiction,

is alienated, trapped, unable to communicate. Conrad was as much a pessimist as Hardy, but Conrad aesthetically embodied his pessimism in subtler ways.

He was also a great master of English prose, an astonishing fact given that English was his third language, after Polish and French; that he was twenty-one before he learned English; and that to the end of his life he spoke English with a strong foreign accent. He approached English's linguistic and literary conventions aslant, but the seeming handicap of his foreignness helped him bring to the English novel a fresh geopolitical understanding, a formal seriousness, and a psychological depth, all of which opened up new possibilities for imaginative literature in English, as indicated by his profound, if vexed, influence on later writers as different from himself as the Nigerian Chinua Achebe and the Anglo-Trinidadian V. S. Naipaul.

Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*¹

[THE TASK OF THE ARTIST]

A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts—whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to those qualities of our being that fit us best for the hazardous enterprise of living. They speak authoritatively to our common-sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to our fears, often to our egoism—but always to our credulity. And their words are heard with reverence, for their concern is with weighty matters: with the cultivation of our minds and the proper care of our bodies, with the attainment of our ambitions, with the perfection of the means and the glorification of our precious aims.

It is otherwise with the artist.

Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities—like

the vulnerable body within a steel armour. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring—and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

It is only some such train of thought, or rather of feeling, that can in a measure explain the aim of the attempt, made in the tale which follows,² to present an unrestful episode in the obscure lives of a few individuals out of all the disregarded multitude of the bewildered, the simple and the voiceless. For, if any part of truth dwells in the belief confessed above, it becomes evident that there is not a place of splendour or a dark corner of the earth that does not deserve, if only a passing glance of wonder and pity. The motive then, may be held to justify the matter of the work; but this preface, which is simply an avowal of endeavour, cannot end here—for the avowal is not yet complete.

Fiction—if it at all aspires to be art—appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art,

therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music—which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.

The sincere endeavour to accomplish that creative task, to go as far on that road as his strength will carry him, to go undeterred by faltering, weariness or reproach, is the only valid justification for the worker in prose. And if his conscience is clear, his answer to those who in the fulness of a wisdom which looks for immediate profit, demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused; who demand to be promptly improved, or encouraged, or frightened, or shocked, or charmed, must run thus:—My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.

To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing

moment. In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one may perchance attain to such clearness of sincerity that at last the presented vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth, shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.

It is evident that he who, rightly or wrongly, holds by the convictions expressed above cannot be faithful to any one of the temporary formulas of his craft. The enduring part of them—the truth which each only imperfectly veils—should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism (which like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of),³ all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him—even on the very threshold of the temple—to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work. In that uneasy solitude the supreme cry of Art for Art itself, loses the exciting ring of its apparent immorality. It sounds far off. It has ceased to be a cry, and is heard only as a whisper, often incomprehensible, but at times and faintly encouraging.

Sometimes, stretched at ease in the shade of a roadside tree, we watch the motions of a labourer in a distant field, and after a time, begin to wonder languidly as to what the fellow may be at. We watch the movements of his body, the waving of his arms, we see him bend down, stand up, hesitate, begin again. It may add to the charm of an idle hour to be told the purpose of his exertions. If we know he is trying to lift a stone, to dig a ditch, to uproot a stump, we look with a more real interest at his efforts; we are disposed to condone the jar of his agitation upon the restfulness of the landscape; and even, if in a brotherly frame of mind, we may bring ourselves to forgive his failure. We understood his object, and, after all, the fellow has tried, and perhaps he had not the strength—and perhaps he had not the knowledge. We forgive, go on our way—and forget.

And so it is with the workman of art. Art is long and life is short,⁴ and success is very far off. And thus, doubtful of strength to travel so far, we talk a little about the aim—the aim of art, which, like life itself, is inspiring, difficult—obscured by mists. It is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult.

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile—such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve. But sometimes, by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished—behold!—all the truth of life is there: a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile—and the return to an eternal rest.

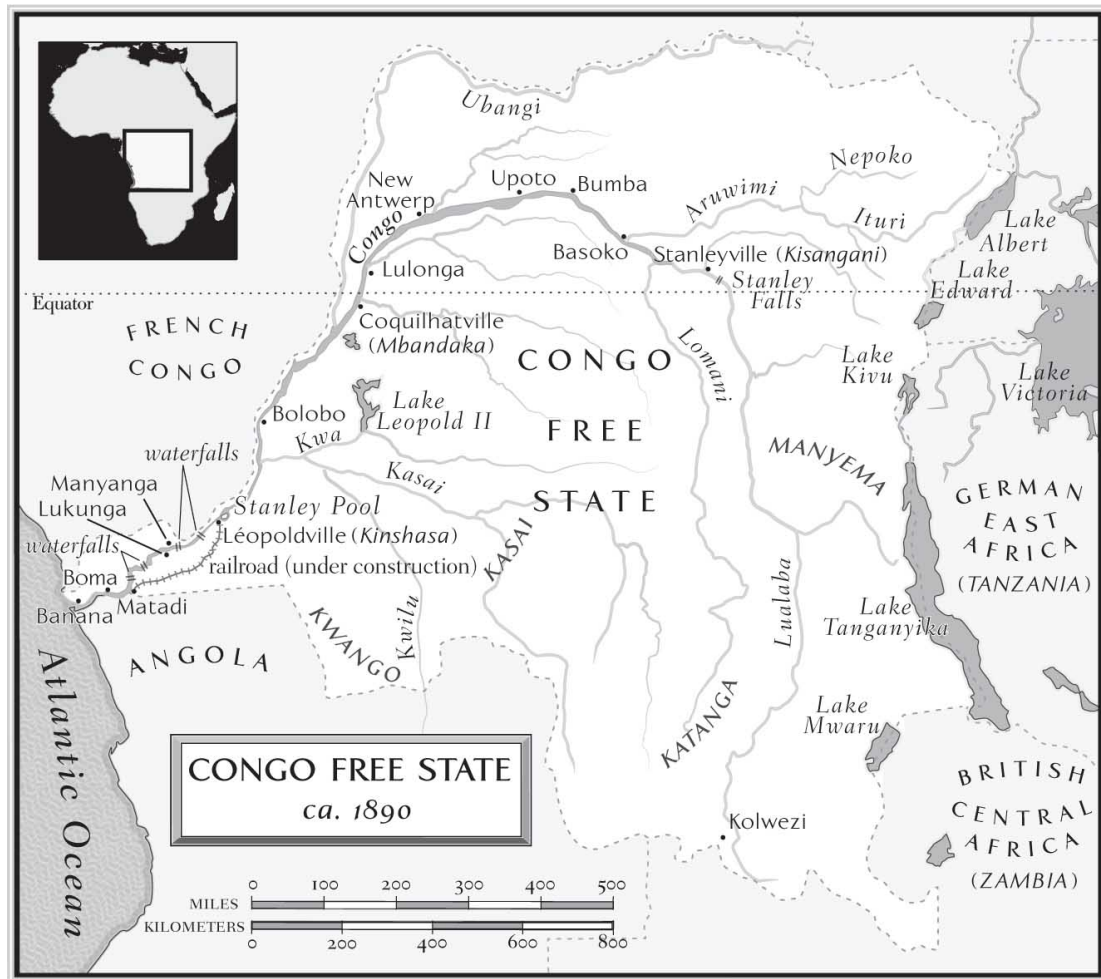
18971898

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Conrad wrote *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* in 1896–97, shortly after his marriage; it was published first in the *New Review*, August–December 1897, and then in book form in 1898. Conrad took particular pleasure in writing the novel and later called it “the story by which, as a creative artist, I stand or fall.” A few months after finishing it, feeling that he was now wholly dedicated to writing and had “done with the sea,” he wrote this preface, which first appeared in the 1898 edition.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: “For the poor always ye have with you” (John 12:8). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *Ars longa, vita brevis*: a Latin proverb, deriving from a dictum of the Greek physician Hippocrates. [Return to reference 4](#)

Heart of Darkness This story is derived from Conrad's experience in Congo in 1890. Like Marlow, the narrator of the story, Conrad had as a child determined one day to visit the heart of Africa. "It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa at the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now: 'When I grow up I shall go *there*' " (*A Personal Record*, 1912).

Conrad was promised a job as a Congo River pilot through the influence of his distant cousin Marguerite Poradowska, who lived in Brussels and knew important officials of the Belgian company that exploited Congo. At this time Congo, although nominally an independent state, the Congo Free State (État Indépendent du Congo), was virtually the personal property of Leopold II, king of Belgium, who made a fortune out of it. Later, the appalling abuses involved in the naked colonial exploitation that went on in the Congo were exposed to public view, and international criticism compelled the setting up of a committee of inquiry in 1904. From 1885 to 1908, masses of Congolese men were worked to death, women were raped, hands were cut off, villages were looted and burned. What Conrad saw in 1890 shocked him profoundly and shook his view of the moral basis of colonialism, of exploration and trade in newly discovered countries, indeed of civilization in general. "*Heart of Darkness* is experience, too," Conrad wrote in his 1917 "Author's Note," "but it is experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case for the perfectly legitimate, I believe, purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers." And later he told Edward Garnett: "Before the Congo I was just a mere animal."



Heart of Darkness describes a voyage up the Congo River into the Congo Free State, then ruled by the despotic King Leopold II of Belgium. The river, the second longest in Africa, is compared in the novel to an uncoiled snake with its head in the Atlantic. Making his way upriver, the protagonist, Marlow, must detour overland on a "two-hundred mile tramp" from the Company Station (Matadi) to the Central Station (Kinshasa), before proceeding by river to the Inner Station (Kisangani).

Conrad arrived in Africa in May 1890 and made his way up the Congo River very much as described in *Heart of Darkness*. At Kinshasa (which Conrad spells Kinchassa) on Stanley Pool, which he reached after an exhausting two-hundred-mile trek from Matadi, near the mouth of the river, Conrad was taken aback to learn that the steamer of which he was to be captain had been damaged and

was undergoing repairs. He was sent as supernumerary on another steamer to learn the river. This steamer was sent to Stanley Falls to collect and bring back to Kinshasa one Georges Antoine Klein, an agent of the company who had fallen so gravely ill that he died on board. Conrad himself then fell seriously ill and eventually returned to London in January 1891 without ever having served as a Congo River pilot. The Congo experience permanently impaired his health; it also permanently haunted his imagination. The nightmare atmosphere of *Heart of Darkness* is an accurate reflection of Conrad's response to his traumatic experience.



IN THE RUBBER COILS.

SCENE—The Congo "Free" State.

Punch magazine, 1906. This political cartoon depicts King Leopold of Belgium as a rubber coil wrapped around a Congolese person. Rubber trees and vines were abundant in the Congo, and as demand for rubber grew in Europe, working conditions for

Africans became increasingly coercive and cruel. Punishments for failing to meet demands included limb amputation and the kidnapping of workers' family members.

The theme of the story is partly the "choice of nightmares" facing whites in the Congo—either to become like the commercially minded manager, who sees Africa, its people, and its resources solely as instruments of financial gain, or to become like Kurtz, the self-tortured and corrupted idealist (inspired by Klein). The manager is a "hollow man" (T. S. Eliot used a quotation from this story as one epigraph for his poem "The Hollow Men"); his only objections to Kurtz are commercial, not moral: Kurtz's methods are "unsound" and would therefore lose the company money. At the last Kurtz seems to recognize the moral horror of his having succumbed to the dark temptations that African life posed for the European. "He had summed up—he had judged." But the story also has other levels of meaning, and the counterpointing of Western civilization in Europe with what that civilization has done in Africa (see the concluding interview between Marlow and Kurtz's "intended"—based on an interview between Conrad and the dead Klein's fiancée) illuminates several of these. The story first appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1899 and was revised for book publication in 1902 as part of *Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories*.

Heart of Darkness

1

The *Nellie*, a cruising yawl,¹ swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend,² and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realise his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns—and even convictions. The Lawyer—the best of old fellows—had, because of his many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug. The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzenmast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow

complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The Director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, “followed the sea” with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it has borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin,³ knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the *Golden Hind*

returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen's Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, bound on other conquests—and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith—the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark "interlopers"⁴ of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned "generals" of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway⁵—a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth."

He was the only man of us who still "followed the sea." The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them—the ship; and so is their country—the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as Destiny. For the rest, after his hours

of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow:

"I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago—the other day. . . . Light came out of this river since—you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine—what d'ye call 'em?—[trireme](#)⁶ in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries—a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too—used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here—the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina—and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages—precious little to eat fit for a civilised man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine⁷ here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death—death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh yes—he did it. Did it very well, too, no doubt, and without thinking much about it either, except afterwards to brag of what he

had gone through in his time, perhaps. They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna⁸ by and by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a decent young citizen in a toga—perhaps too much dice, you know—coming out here in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader, even, to mend his fortunes. Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination—you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate."

He paused.

"Mind," he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower—"Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea

—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . .”

He broke off. Flames glided in the river, small green flames, red flames, white flames, pursuing, overtaking, joining, crossing each other—then separating slowly or hastily. The traffic of the great city went on in the deepening night upon the sleepless river. We looked on, waiting patiently—there was nothing else to do till the end of the flood; but it was only after a long silence, when he said, in a hesitating voice, “I suppose you fellows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit,” that we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences.

“I don’t want to bother you much with what happened to me personally,” he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear; “yet to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me—and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough too—and pitiful—not extraordinary in any way—not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light.

“I had then, as you remember, just returned to London after a lot of Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas—a regular dose of the East—six years or so, and I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilise you. It was very fine for a time, but after a bit I did get tired of resting. Then I began to look for a ship—I should think the hardest work on earth. But the ships wouldn’t even look at me. And I got tired of that game too.

“Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked

particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try now. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I had a hankering after.

"True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird—a silly little bird. Then I remembered there was a big concern, a Company for trade on that river. Dash it all! I thought to myself, they can't trade without using some kind of craft on that lot of fresh water—steamboats! Why shouldn't I try to get charge of one? I went on along Fleet Street,⁹ but could not shake off the idea. The snake had charmed me.

"You understand it was a Continental concern, that Trading Society; but I have a lot of relations living on the Continent, because it's cheap and not so nasty as it looks, they say.

"I am sorry to own I began to worry them. This was already a fresh departure for me. I was not used to get things that way, you know. I always went my own road and on my own legs where I had a mind to go. I wouldn't have believed it of myself; but, then—you see—I felt somehow I must get there by hook or by crook. So I worried them. The men said, 'My dear fellow,' and did nothing. Then—would you believe it?—I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job. Heavens! Well, you see, the notion drove me. I had an aunt, a dear enthusiastic soul. She wrote:

'It will be delightful. I am ready to do anything, anything for you. It is a glorious idea. I know the wife of a very high personage in the Administration, and also a man who has lots of influence with,' etc. etc. She was determined to make no end of fuss to get me appointed skipper of a river steamboat, if such was my fancy.

"I got my appointment—of course; and I got it very quick. It appears the Company had received news that one of their captains had been killed in a scuffle with the natives. This was my chance, and it made me the more anxious to go. It was only months and months afterwards, when I made the attempt to recover what was left of the body, that I heard the original quarrel arose from a misunderstanding about some hens. Yes, two black hens. Fresleven—that was the fellow's name, a Dane—thought himself wronged somehow in the bargain, so he went ashore and started to hammer the chief of the village with a stick. Oh, it didn't surprise me in the least to hear this, and at the same time to be told that Fresleven was the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs. No doubt he was; but he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause, you know, and he probably felt the need at last of asserting his self-respect in some way. Therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck, till some man—I was told the chief's son—in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man—and of course it went quite easy between the shoulder-blades. Then the whole population cleared into the forest, expecting all kinds of calamities to happen, while, on the other hand, the steamer Fresleven commanded left also in a bad panic, in charge of the engineer, I believe. Afterwards nobody seemed to trouble much about Fresleven's remains, till I got out and stepped into his shoes. I couldn't let it rest, though; but when an opportunity offered at last to meet my predecessor, the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell. And the village was deserted, the huts gaped black, rotting, all askew within the fallen enclosures. A calamity had come to it,

sure enough. The people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them, men, women, and children, through the bush, and they had never returned. What became of the hens I don't know either. I should think the cause of progress got them, anyhow. However, through this glorious affair I got my appointment, before I had fairly begun to hope for it.

"I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

"A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with Venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to. Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me—still knitting with downcast eyes—and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red—good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly lager-beer. However, I wasn't going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there—fascinating—deadly—like a snake. Ough! A door opened, a white-haired

secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frockcoat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. *Bon voyage*.

"In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to.

"I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy—I don't know—something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was walking back and forth introducing them. The old one sat on her chair. Her flat cloth slippers were propped up on a foot-warmer, and a cat reposed on her lap. She wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on one cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles hung on the tip of her nose. She glanced at me above the glasses. The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinising the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. *Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant.*¹ Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again—not half, by a long way.

"There was yet a visit to the doctor. 'A simple formality,' assured me the secretary, with an air of taking an immense part in all my sorrows. Accordingly a young chap wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some clerk I suppose—there must have been clerks in the business, though the house was as still as a house in a city of the dead—came from somewhere upstairs, and led me forth. He was shabby and careless, with ink-stains on the sleeves of his jacket, and his cravat was large and billowy, under a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot. It was a little too early for the doctor, so I proposed a drink, and thereupon he developed a vein of joviality. As we sat over our vermouths he glorified the Company's business, and by and by I expressed casually my surprise at him not going out there. He became very cool and collected all at once. 'I am not such a fool as I look, quoth Plato to his disciples,' he said sententiously, emptied his glass with great resolution, and we rose.

"The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. 'Good, good for there,' he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too.' He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that question in the interests of science too?' 'It would be,' he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot, but . . .' 'Are you an alienist?'² I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be—a little,' answered that original³ imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you Messieurs who go out

there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation . . . ' I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical. 'If I were,' said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous,' he said, with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-bye. Ah! Good-bye. Adieu. In the tropics one must before everything keep calm.' . . . He lifted a warning forefinger. . . . '*Du calme, du calme. Adieu.*'

"One thing more remained to do—say good-bye to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a cup of tea—the last decent cup of tea for many days—and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing-room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature—a piece of good fortune for the Company—a man you don't get hold of every day. Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two-penny-halfpenny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital—you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.

" 'You forget, dear Charlie, that the labourer is worthy of his hire,' she said brightly. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some

confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

"After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on—and I left. In the street—I don't know why—a queer feeling came to me that I was an impostor. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice, with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street, had a moment—I won't say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth.

"I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there greyish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps—settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pin-heads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers—to take care of the custom-house clerks presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast

looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places—trading places—with names like Gran' Bassam, Little Popo; names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere.

"We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves,⁴ that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularised impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

"It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. We anchored off the seat of the government. But my work would not begin till some two hundred miles farther on. So as soon as I could I made a start for a place thirty miles higher up.

"I had my passage on a little sea-going steamer. Her captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman, invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean, fair, and morose, with lanky hair and a shuffling gait. As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head contemptuously at the shore. 'Been living there?' he asked. I said, 'Yes.' 'Fine lot these government chaps—are they not?' he went on, speaking English with great precision and considerable bitterness. 'It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month. I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes up country?' I said to him I expected to see that soon. 'So-o-o!' he exclaimed. He shuffled athwart, keeping one eye ahead vigilantly. 'Don't be too sure,' he continued. 'The other day I took up a man who hanged himself on the road. He was a Swede, too.' 'Hanged himself! Why, in God's name?' I cried. He kept on looking out watchfully. 'Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps.'

"At last we opened a reach. A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned-up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others with iron

roofs, amongst a waste of excavations, or hanging to the declivity. A continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. A jetty⁵ projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare. "There's your Company's station," said the Swede, pointing to three wooden barrack-like structures on the rocky slope. 'I will send your things up. Four boxes did you say? So. Farewell.'

"I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders, and also for an undersized railway truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty nails. To the left a clump of trees made a shady spot, where dark things seemed to stir feebly. I blinked, the path was steep. A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.

"A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind wagged to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking. Another report from the cliff made me think suddenly of that ship of war I had seen firing into a continent. It was the same kind of ominous voice; but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea. All their meagre breasts panted together, the violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared

stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages. Behind this raw matter one of the reclaimed, the product of the new forces at work, strolled despondently, carrying a rifle by its middle. He had a uniform jacket with one button off, and seeing a white man on the path, hoisted his weapon to his shoulder with alacrity. This was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be. He was speedily reassured, and with a large, white, rascally grin, and a glance at his charge, seemed to take me into partnership in his exalted trust. After all, I also was a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings.

"Instead of going up, I turned and descended to the left. My idea was to let that chain-gang get out of sight before I climbed the hill. You know I am not particularly tender; I've had to strike and to fend off. I've had to resist and to attack sometimes—that's only one way of resisting—without counting the exact cost, according to the demands of such sort of life as I had blundered into. I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the stars! these were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men, I tell you. But as I stood on this hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly. How insidious he could be, too, I was only to find out several months later and a thousand miles farther. For a moment I stood appalled, as though by a warning. Finally I descended the hill, obliquely, towards the trees I had seen.

"I avoided a vast artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found it impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit, anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don't know. Then I nearly fell into a very narrow ravine, almost no more than a scar in the hillside. I discovered that a lot of imported drainage-pipes for the settlement had been tumbled in there. There wasn't one that was not broken. It

was a wanton smash-up. At last I got under the trees. My purpose was to stroll into the shade for a moment; but no sooner within than it seemed to me I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno. The rapids were near, and an uninterrupted, uniform, headlong, rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound—as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible.

“Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die.

“They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young—almost a boy—but you know with them it’s hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held—there was no other movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit of white worsted⁶ round his neck—Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge—an ornament—a charm—a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It

looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

"Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone.

"I didn't want any more loitering in the shade, and I made haste towards the station. When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca⁷ jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

"I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, 'to get a breath of fresh air.' The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralisation of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such

linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, 'I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.' Thus this man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.

"Everything else in the station was in a muddle,—heads, things, buildings. Strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods, rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory.

"I had to wait in the station for ten days—an eternity. I lived in a hut in the yard, but to be out of the chaos I would sometimes get into the accountant's office. It was built of horizontal planks, and so badly put together that, as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from neck to heels with narrow strips of sunlight. There was no need to open the big shutter to see. It was hot there too; big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting, but stabbed. I sat generally on the floor, while, of faultless appearance (and even slightly scented), perching on a high stool, he wrote, he wrote. Sometimes he stood up for exercise. When a truckle-bed with a sick man (some invalided agent from up country) was put in there, he exhibited a gentle annoyance. 'The groans of this sick person' he said, 'distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate.'

"One day he remarked, without lifting his head, 'In the interior you will no doubt meet Mr Kurtz.' On my asking who Mr Kurtz was, he said he was a first-class agent; and seeing my disappointment at this information, he added slowly, laying down his pen, 'He is a very remarkable person.' Further questions elicited from him that Mr Kurtz was at present in charge of a trading-post, a very important one, in the true ivory-country, at 'the very bottom of there. Sends in as much ivory as all the others put together . . .' He began to write again. The sick man was too ill to groan. The flies buzzed in a great peace.

"Suddenly there was a growing murmur of voices and a great tramping of feet. A caravan had come in. A violent babble of uncouth sounds burst out on the other side of the planks. All the carriers were speaking together, and in the midst of the uproar the lamentable voice of the chief agent was heard 'giving it up' tearfully for the twentieth time that day. . . . He rose slowly. 'What a frightful row,' he said. He crossed the room gently to look at the sick man, and returning, said to me, 'He does not hear.' 'What! Dead?' I asked, startled. 'No, not yet,' he answered, with great composure. Then, alluding with a toss of the head to the tumult in the station-yard, 'When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages—hate them to the death.' He remained thoughtful for a moment. 'When you see Mr Kurtz,' he went on, 'tell him from me that everything here—he glanced at the desk—is very satisfactory. I don't like to write to him—with those messengers of ours you never know who may get hold of your letter—at that Central Station.' He stared at me for a moment with his mild, bulging eyes. 'Oh, he will go far, very far,' he began again. 'He will be a somebody in the Administration before long. They, above—the Council in Europe, you know—mean him to be.'

"He turned to his work. The noise outside had ceased, and presently in going out I stopped at the door. In the steady buzz of flies the homeward-bound agent was lying flushed and insensible; the other, bent over his books, was making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death.

"Next day I left that station at last, with a caravan of sixty men, for a two-hundred-mile tramp.

"No use telling you much about that. Paths, paths, everywhere; a stamped-in network of paths spreading over the empty land, through long grass, through burnt grass, through thickets, down and up chilly ravines, up and down stony hills ablaze with heat; and a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to travelling on the road

between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon. Only here the dwellings were gone too. Still, I passed through several abandoned villages. There's something pathetically childish in the ruins of grass walls. Day after day, with the stamp and shuffle of sixty pair of bare feet behind me, each pair under a 60-lb. load. Camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march. Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side. A great silence around and above. Perhaps on some quiet night the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint; a sound weird, appealing, suggestive, and wild—and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country. Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform, camping on the path with an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris,⁸ very hospitable and festive—not to say drunk. Was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on, may be considered as a permanent improvement. I had a white companion too, not a bad chap, but rather too fleshy and with the exasperating habit of fainting on the hot hillsides, miles away from the least bit of shade and water. Annoying, you know, to hold your own coat like a parasol over a man's head while he is coming-to. I couldn't help asking him once what he meant by coming there at all. 'To make money, of course. What do you think?' he said scornfully. Then he got fever, and had to be carried in a hammock slung under a pole. As he weighed sixteen stone⁹ I had no end of rows with the carriers. They jibbed, ran away, sneaked off with their loads in the night—quite a mutiny. So, one evening, I made a speech in English with gestures, not one of which was lost to the sixty pairs of eyes before me, and the next morning I started the hammock off in front all right. An hour afterwards I came upon the whole concern wrecked in a bush—man, hammock, groans, blankets, horrors. The heavy pole had skinned his poor nose. He was very anxious for me

to kill somebody, but there wasn't the shadow of a carrier near. I remembered the old doctor—"It would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot." I felt I was becoming scientifically interesting. However, all that is to no purpose. On the fifteenth day I came in sight of the big river again, and hobbled into the Central Station. It was on a back water surrounded by scrub and forest, with a pretty border of smelly mud on one side, and on the three others enclosed by a crazy fence of rushes. A neglected gap was all the gate it had, and the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show. White men with long staves in their hands appeared languidly from amongst the buildings, strolling up to take a look at me, and then retired out of sight somewhere. One of them, a stout, excitable chap with black moustaches, informed me with great volubility and many digressions, as soon as I told him who I was, that my steamer was at the bottom of the river. I was thunderstruck. What, how, why? Oh, it was 'all right.' The 'manager himself was there. All quite correct. 'Everybody had behaved splendidly! splendidly!'—"You must," he said in agitation, 'go and see the general manager at once. He is waiting!'

"I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure—not at all. Certainly the affair was too stupid—when I think of it—to be altogether natural. Still . . . But at the moment it presented itself simply as a confounded nuisance. The steamer was sunk. They had started two days before in a sudden hurry up the river with the manager on board, in charge of some volunteer skipper, and before they had been out three hours they tore the bottom out of her on stones, and she sank near the south bank. I asked myself what I was to do there, now my boat was lost. As a matter of fact, I had plenty to do in fishing my command out of the river. I had to set about it the very next day. That, and the repairs when I brought the pieces to the station, took some months.

"My first interview with the manager was curious. He did not ask me to sit down after my twenty-mile walk that morning. He was

commonplace in complexion, in feature, in manners, and in voice. He was of middle size and of ordinary build. His eyes, of the usual blue, were perhaps remarkably cold, and he certainly could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an axe. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy—a smile—not a smile—I remember it, but I can't explain. It was unconscious, this smile was, though just after he had said something it got intensified for an instant. It came at the end of his speeches like a seal applied on the words to make the meaning of the commonest phrase appear absolutely inscrutable. He was a common trader, from his youth up employed in these parts—nothing more. He was obeyed, yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect. He inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust—just uneasiness—nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a . . . a . . . faculty can be. He had no genius for organising, for initiative, or for order even. That was evident in such things as the deplorable state of the station. He had no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come to him—why? Perhaps because he was never ill . . . He had served three terms of three years out there . . . Because triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions is a kind of power in itself. When he went home on leave he rioted on a large scale—pompously. Jack ashore—with a difference—in externals only. This one could gather from his casual talk. He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going—that's all. But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause—for out there there were no external checks. Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every 'agent' in the station, he was heard to say, 'Men who come out here should have no entrails.' He sealed the utterance with that smile of his, as though it had been a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping. You fancied you had seen things—but the seal was on. When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be

made, for which a special house had to be built. This was the station's mess-room. Where he sat was the first place—the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. He was neither civil nor uncivil. He was quiet. He allowed his 'boy'—an overfed young negro from the coast—to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence.

"He began to speak as soon as he saw me. I had been very long on the road. He could not wait. Had to start without me. The up-river stations had to be relieved. There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on—and so on, and so on. He paid no attention to my explanations, and, playing with a stick of sealing-wax, repeated several times that the situation was 'very grave, very grave.' There were rumours that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr Kurtz, was ill. Hoped it was not true. Mr Kurtz was . . . I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought. I interrupted him by saying I had heard of Mr Kurtz on the coast. 'Ah! So they talk of him down there,' he murmured to himself. Then he began again, assuring me Mr Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. He was, he said, 'very, very uneasy.' Certainly he fidgeted on his chair a good deal, exclaimed, 'Ah, Mr Kurtz!' broke the stick of sealing-wax and seemed dumbfounded by the accident. Next thing he wanted to know 'how long it would take to' . . . I interrupted him again. Being hungry, you know, and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage. 'How can I tell?' I said, 'I haven't even seen the wreck yet—some months, no doubt.' All this talk seemed to me so futile. 'Some months,' he said. 'Well, let us say three months before we can make a start. Yes. That ought to do the affair.' I flung out of his hut (he lived all alone in a clay hut with a sort of verandah) muttering to myself my opinion of him. He was a chattering idiot. Afterwards I took it back when it was borne in upon me startingly with what extreme nicety he had estimated the time requisite for the 'affair.'

"I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion.

"Oh, these months! Well, never mind. Various things happened. One evening a grass shed full of calico, cotton prints, beads, and I don't know what else, burst into a blaze so suddenly that you would have thought the earth had opened to let an avenging fire consume all that trash. I was smoking my pipe quietly by my dismantled steamer, and saw them all cutting capers in the light, with their arms lifted high, when the stout man with moustaches came tearing down to the river, a tin pail in his hand, assured me that everybody was 'behaving splendidly, splendidly,' dipped about a quart of water and tore back again. I noticed there was a hole in the bottom of his pail.

"I strolled up. There was no hurry. You see the thing had gone off like a box of matches. It had been hopeless from the very first. The flame had leaped high, driven everybody back, lighted up everything—and collapsed. The shed was already a heap of embers glowing fiercely. A nigger was being beaten near by. They said he had caused the fire in some way; be that as it may, he was screeching most horribly. I saw him, later, for several days, sitting in a bit of shade looking very sick and trying to recover himself: afterwards he arose and went out—and the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again. As I approached the glow from the dark I found myself at the back of two men, talking. I heard the

name of Kurtz pronounced, then the words, 'take advantage of this unfortunate accident.' One of the men was the manager. I wished him a good evening. 'Did you ever see anything like it—eh? it is incredible,' he said, and walked off. The other man remained. He was a first-class agent, young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose. He was standoffish with the other agents, and they on their side said he was the manager's spy upon them. As to me, I had hardly ever spoken to him before. We got into talk, and by and by we strolled away from the hissing ruins. Then he asked me to his room, which was in the main building of the station. He struck a match, and I perceived that this young aristocrat had not only a silver-mounted dressing-case but also a whole candle all to himself. Just at that time the manager was the only man supposed to have any right to candles. Native mats covered the clay walls; a collection of spears, assegais,¹ shields, knives, was hung up in trophies. The business entrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks—so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year—waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something, I don't know what—straw maybe. Anyway, it could not be found there, and as it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for. An act of special creation perhaps. However, they were all waiting—all the sixteen or twenty pilgrims of them—for something; and upon my word it did not seem an uncongenial occupation, from the way they took it, though the only thing that ever came to them was disease—as far as I could see. They beguiled the time by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was as unreal as everything else—as the philanthropic pretence of the whole concern, as their talk, as their government, as their show of work. The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account—but as to effectually lifting a little finger—oh

no. By heavens! there is something after all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while another must not look at a halter. Steal a horse straight out. Very well. He has done it. Perhaps he can ride. But there is a way of looking at a halter that would provoke the most charitable of saints into a kick.

"I had no idea why he wanted to be sociable, but as we chatted in there it suddenly occurred to me the fellow was trying to get at something—in fact, pumping me. He alluded constantly to Europe, to the people I was supposed to know there—putting leading questions as to my acquaintances in the sepulchral city, and so on. His little eyes glittered like mica² discs—with curiosity—though he tried to keep up a bit of superciliousness. At first I was astonished, but very soon I became awfully curious to see what he would find out from me. I couldn't possibly imagine what I had in me to make it worth his while. It was very pretty to see how he baffled himself, for in truth my body was full only of chills, and my head had nothing in it but that wretched steamboat business. It was evident he took me for a perfectly shameless prevaricator. At last he got angry, and, to conceal a movement of furious annoyance, he yawned. I rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.

"It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding an empty half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr Kurtz had painted this—in this very station more than a year ago—while waiting for means to go to his trading-post. 'Tell me, pray,' said I, 'who is this Mr Kurtz?'

" 'The chief of the Inner Station,' he answered in a short tone, looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said, laughing. 'And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Every one knows that.' He was silent for a while. 'He is a prodigy,' he said at last. 'He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else. We want,' he began to declaim suddenly, 'for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide

sympathies, a singleness of purpose.' 'Who says that?' I asked. 'Lots of them,' he replied. 'Some even write that; and so *he* comes here, a special being, as you ought to know.' 'Why ought I to know?' I interrupted, really surprised. He paid no attention. 'Yes. To-day he is chief of the best station, next year he will be assistant-manager, two years more and . . . but I daresay you know what he will be in two years' time. You are of the new gang—the gang of virtue. The same people who sent him specially also recommended you. Oh, don't say no. I've my own eyes to trust.' Light dawned upon me. My dear aunt's influential acquaintances were producing an unexpected effect upon that young man. I nearly burst into a laugh. 'Do you read the Company's confidential correspondence?' I asked. He hadn't a word to say. It was great fun. 'When Mr Kurtz,' I continued severely, 'is General Manager, you won't have the opportunity.'

"He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went outside. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight; the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute makes!' said the indefatigable man with the moustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression—punishment—bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager . . .' He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. 'Not in bed yet,' he said, with a kind of servile heartiness; 'it's so natural. Ha! Danger—agitation.' He vanished. I went on to the river-side, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear, 'Heap of muffs—go to.' The pilgrims could be seen in knots gesticulating, discussing. Several had still their staves in their hands. I verily believe they took these sticks to bed with them. Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through the dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart—its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life. The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere near by, and then fetched a deep sigh that made me mend my pace away from there. I felt a hand

introducing itself under my arm. 'My dear sir,' said the fellow, 'I don't want to be misunderstood, and especially by you, who will see Mr Kurtz long before I can have that pleasure. I wouldn't like him to get a false idea of my disposition. . . .'

"I let him run on, this papier-mâché Mephistopheles,³ and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by and by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver—over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a sombre gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself. I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us? I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr Kurtz was in there. I had heard enough about it too—God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it—no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much as smiled, he would—though a man of sixty—offer to

fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies—which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world—what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see—you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. . . .”

He was silent for a while.

“. . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone. . . .”

He paused again as if reflecting, then added:

“Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know. . . .”

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he, sitting apart, had been no more to us than a voice. There was not a word from anybody. The others might have been asleep, but I was awake. I listened, I listened on the watch for the sentence, for the word, that would give me the clue to the faint uneasiness inspired by this narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river.

" . . . Yes—I let him run on," Marlow began again, "and think what he pleased about the powers that were behind me. I did! And there was nothing behind me! There was nothing but that wretched, old, mangled steamboat I was leaning against, while he talked fluently about 'the necessity for every man to get on.' 'And when one comes out here, you conceive, it is not to gaze at the moon.' Mr Kurtz was a 'universal genius,' but even a genius would find it easier to work with 'adequate tools—intelligent men.' He did not make bricks—why, there was a physical impossibility in the way—as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was because 'no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors.' Did I see it? I saw it. What more did I want? What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work—to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. There were cases of them down at the coast—cases—piled up—burst—split! You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that station yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the grove of death. You could fill your pockets with rivets for the trouble of stooping down—and there wasn't one rivet to be found where it was wanted. We had plates that would do, but nothing to fasten them with. And every week the messenger, a lone negro, letter-bag on shoulder and staff in hand, left our station for the coast. And several times a week a coast caravan came in with trade goods—ghastly glazed calico that made you shudder only to look at it, glass beads value about a penny a quart, confounded spotted cotton handkerchiefs. And no rivets. Three carriers could have brought all that was wanted to set that steamboat afloat.

"He was becoming confidential now, but I fancy my unresponsive attitude must have exasperated him at last, for he judged it necessary to inform me he feared neither God nor devil, let alone any mere man. I said I could see that very well, but what I wanted was a certain quantity of rivets—and rivets were what really Mr Kurtz wanted, if he had only known it. Now letters went to the coast every week. . . . 'My dear sir,' he cried, 'I write from dictation.' I demanded rivets. There was a way—for an intelligent man. He changed his manner; became very cold, and suddenly began to talk about a

hippopotamus; wondered whether sleeping on board the steamer (I stuck to my salvage night and day) I wasn't disturbed. There was an old hippo that had the bad habit of getting out on the bank and roaming at night over the station grounds. The pilgrims used to turn out in a body and empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him. Some even had sat up o' nights for him. All this energy was wasted, though. 'That animal has a charmed life,' he said; 'but you can say this only of brutes in this country. No man—you apprehend me?—no man here bears a charmed life.' He stood there for a moment in the moonlight with his delicate hooked nose set a little askew, and his mica eyes glittering without a wink, then, with a curt Good-night, he strode off. I could see he was disturbed and considerably puzzled, which made me feel more hopeful than I had been for days. It was a great comfort to turn from that chap to my influential friend, the battered, twisted, ruined, tinpot steamboat. I clambered on board. She rang under my feet like an empty Huntley & Palmer biscuit-tin kicked along a gutter; she was nothing so solid in make, and rather less pretty in shape, but I had expended enough hard work on her to make me love her. No influential friend would have served me better. She had given me a chance to come out a bit—to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.

"I was not surprised to see somebody sitting aft, on the deck, with his legs dangling over the mud. You see I rather chummed with the few mechanics there were in that station, whom the other pilgrims naturally despised—on account of their imperfect manners, I suppose. This was the foreman—a boiler-maker by trade—a good worker. He was a lank, bony, yellow-faced man, with big intense eyes. His aspect was worried, and his head was as bald as the palm of my hand; but his hair in falling seemed to have stuck to his chin, and had prospered in the new locality, for his beard hung down to

his waist. He was a widower with six young children (he had left them in charge of a sister of his to come out there), and the passion of his life was pigeon-flying. He was an enthusiast and a connoisseur. He would rave about pigeons. After work hours he used sometimes to come over from his hut for a talk about his children and his pigeons; at work, when he had to crawl in the mud under the bottom of the steamboat, he would tie up that beard of his in a kind of white serviette⁴ he brought for the purpose. It had loops to go over his ears. In the evening he could be seen squatted on the bank rinsing that wrapper in the creek with great care, then spreading it solemnly on a bush to dry.

"I slapped him on the back and shouted 'We shall have rivets!' He scrambled to his feet exclaiming 'No! Rivets!' as though he couldn't believe his ears. Then in a low voice, 'You . . . eh?' I don't know why we behaved like lunatics. I put my finger to the side of my nose and nodded mysteriously. 'Good for you!' he cried, snapped his fingers above his head, lifting one foot. I tried a jig. We capered on the iron deck. A frightful clatter came but of that hulk, and the virgin forest on the other bank of the creek sent it back in a thundering roll upon the sleeping station. It must have made some of the pilgrims sit up in their hovels. A dark figure obscured the lighted doorway of the manager's hut, vanished, then, a second or so after, the doorway itself vanished too. We stopped, and the silence driven away by the stamping of our feet flowed back again from the recesses of the land. The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence. And it moved not. A deadened burst of mighty splashes and snorts reached us from afar, as though an ichthyosaurus⁵ had been taking a bath of glitter in the great river. 'After all,' said the boiler-maker in a reasonable tone, 'why shouldn't we get the rivets?' Why not, indeed! I did not know of any reason why we shouldn't. 'They'll come in three weeks,' I said confidently.

"But they didn't. Instead of rivets there came an invasion, an infliction, a visitation. It came in sections during the next three weeks, each section headed by a donkey carrying a white man in new clothes and tan shoes, bowing from that elevation right and left to the impressed pilgrims. A quarrelsome band of footsore sulky niggers trod on the heels of the donkey; a lot of tents, campstools, tin boxes, white cases, brown bales would be shot down in the courtyard, and the air of mystery would deepen a little over the muddle of the station. Five such instalments came, with their absurd air of disorderly flight with the loot of innumerable outfit shops and provision stores, that, one would think, they were lugging, after a raid, into the wilderness for equitable division. It was an inextricable mess of things decent in themselves but that human folly made look like the spoils of thieving.

"This devoted band called itself the Eldorado⁶ Exploring Expedition, and I believe they were sworn to secrecy. Their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers: it was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage; there was not an atom of foresight or of serious intention in the whole batch of them, and they did not seem aware these things are wanted for the work of the world. To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. Who paid the expenses of the noble enterprise I don't know; but the uncle of our manager was leader of that lot.

"In exterior he resembled a butcher in a poor neighbourhood, and his eyes had a look of sleepy cunning. He carried his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs, and during the time his gang infested the station spoke to no one but his nephew. You could see these two roaming about all day long with their heads close together in an everlasting confab.⁷

"I had given up worrying myself about the rivets. One's capacity for that kind of folly is more limited than you would suppose. I said Hang!—and let things slide. I had plenty of time for meditation, and now and then I would give some thought to Kurtz. I wasn't very

interested in him. No. Still, I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there.”

Endnotes

- Note 1: Two-masted boat.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: River port on the south bank of the Thames twenty-four miles east (downriver) of London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:
Sir John Franklin (1786–1847), Arctic explorer who in 1845 commanded an expedition consisting of the ships *Erebus* and *Terror* in search of the Northwest Passage. The ships never returned. Sir Francis Drake (ca. 1540–1596), Elizabethan naval hero and explorer, sailed around the world on his ship *The Golden Hind*. Upon his return to England in 1580, Queen Elizabeth knighted Drake aboard his ship, loaded with captured Spanish treasure.
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:
Private ships muscling in on the monopoly of the East India Company, which was founded in 1600, lost its trading monopoly in 1813, and transferred its governmental functions to the Crown in 1858. Deptford, on the south bank of the Thames, on the eastern edge of London, was once an important dockyard. Greenwich is on the south bank of the Thames immediately east of Deptford. Erith is eight miles farther east. “ ‘Change”: the Stock Exchange.
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Navigable part of a river, through which ships enter and depart.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ancient Greek and Roman galley with three ranks of oars.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Wine from a famed wine-making district in Campania (Italy).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A city in northern Italy once directly on the Adriatic Sea and an important naval station in Roman times. It is now about six miles from the sea, connected with it by a canal.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Street in central London.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Hail! . . . Those who are about to die salute you" (Latin). The Roman gladiators' salute to the emperor on entering the arena.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Doctor who treats mental diseases. (The term has now been replaced by *psychiatrist*.)[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Eccentric person.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Tropical evergreen trees or shrubs with roots and stems forming dense thickets along riverbanks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wharf or pier.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fine wool fabric.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Made from the wool of a South American animal by that name.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Natives of Zanzibar, an island off the east coast of Africa, once part of the sultanate of Zanzibar and a British protectorate, now part of the independent state of Tanzania. Zanzibaris were used as mercenaries throughout Africa.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: One stone equals 14 pounds. The man weighed 224 pounds.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Slender iron-tipped spears.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Glassy mineral.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In German legend, a name for the demon to whom Faust sold his soul.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Table napkin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Large prehistoric marine creature.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fabled land of gold (*el dorado*; "the gilded" [Spanish]) imagined by the Spanish conquistadors to exist in South America.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Confabulation, talk.[Return to reference 7](#)

2

"One evening as I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat, I heard voices approaching—and there were the nephew and the uncle strolling along the bank. I laid my head on my arm again, and had nearly lost myself in a doze, when somebody said in my ear, as it were: 'I am as harmless as a little child, but I don't like to be dictated to. Am I the manager—or am I not? I was ordered to send him there. It's incredible.' . . . I became aware that the two were standing on the shore alongside the forepart of the steamboat, just below my head. I did not move; it did not occur to me to move: I was sleepy. 'It *is* unpleasant,' grunted the uncle. 'He has asked the Administration to be sent there,' said the other, 'with the idea of showing what he could do; and I was instructed accordingly. Look at the influence that man must have. Is it not frightful?' They both agreed it was frightful, then made several bizarre remarks: 'Make rain and fine weather—one man—the Council—by the nose'—bits of absurd sentences that got the better of my drowsiness, so that I had pretty near the whole of my wits about me when the uncle said, 'The climate may do away with this difficulty for you. Is he alone there?' 'Yes,' answered the manager; 'he sent his assistant down the river with a note to me in these terms: "Clear this poor devil out of the country, and don't bother sending more of that sort. I had rather be alone than have the kind of men you can dispose of with me." It was more than a year ago. Can you imagine such impudence?' 'Anything since then?' asked the other hoarsely. 'Ivory,' jerked the nephew; 'lots of it—prime sort—lots—most annoying, from him.' 'And with that?' questioned the heavy rumble. 'Invoice,' was the reply fired out, so to speak. Then silence. They had been talking about Kurtz.

"I was broad awake by this time, but, lying perfectly at ease, remained still, having no inducement to change my position. 'How did that ivory come all this way?' growled the elder man, who seemed very vexed. The other explained that it had come with a fleet of canoes in charge of an English half-caste clerk Kurtz had with him; that Kurtz had apparently intended to return himself, the

station being by that time bare of goods and stores, but after coming three hundred miles, had suddenly decided to go back, which he started to do alone in a small dugout with four paddlers, leaving the half-caste to continue down the river with the ivory. The two fellows there seemed astounded at anybody attempting such a thing. They were at a loss for an adequate motive. As for me, I seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dugout, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home—perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards his empty and desolate station. I did not know the motive. Perhaps he was just simply a fine fellow who stuck to his work for its own sake. His name, you understand, had not been pronounced once. He was ‘that man.’ The half-caste, who, as far as I could see, had conducted a difficult trip with great prudence and pluck, was invariably alluded to as ‘that scoundrel.’ The ‘scoundrel’ had reported that the ‘man’ had been very ill—had recovered imperfectly. . . . The two below me moved away then a few paces, and stroked back and forth at some little distance. I heard: ‘Military post—doctor—two hundred miles—quite alone now—unavoidable delays—nine months—no news—strange rumours.’ They approached again, just as the manager was saying, ‘No one, as far as I know, unless a species of wandering trader—a pestilential fellow, snapping ivory from the natives.’ Who was it they were talking about now? I gathered in snatches that this was some man supposed to be in Kurtz’s district, and of whom the manager did not approve. ‘We will not be free from unfair competition till one of these fellows is hanged for an example,’ he said. ‘Certainly,’ grunted the other; ‘get him hanged! Why not? Anything—anything can be done in this country. That’s what I say; nobody here, you understand, *here*, can endanger your position. And why? You stand the climate—you outlast them all. The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to—’ They moved off and whispered, then their voices rose again. ‘The extraordinary series of delays is not my fault. I did my possible.’⁸ The fat man sighed, ‘Very sad.’ ‘And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk,’

continued the other; 'he bothered me enough when he was here. "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanising, improving, instructing." Conceive you—that ass! And he wants to be manager! No, it's—' Here he got choked by excessive indignation, and I lifted my head the least bit. I was surprised to see how near they were—right under me. I could have spat upon their hats. They were looking on the ground, absorbed in thought. The manager was switching his leg with a slender twig: his sagacious relative lifted his head. 'You have been well since you came out this time?' he asked. The other gave a start. 'Who? I? Oh! Like a charm—like a charm. But the rest—oh, my goodness! All sick. They die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country—it's incredible!' 'H'm. Just so,' grunted the uncle. 'Ah! my boy, trust to this—I say, trust to this.' I saw him extend his short flipper of an arm for a gesture that took in the forest, the creek, the mud, the river—seemed to beckon with a dishonouring flourish before the sunlit face of the land a treacherous appeal to the lurking death, to the hidden evil, to the profound darkness of its heart. It was so startling that I leaped to my feet and looked back at the edge of the forest, as though I had expected an answer of some sort to that black display of confidence. You know the foolish notions that come to one sometimes. The high stillness confronted these two figures with its ominous patience, waiting for the passing away of a fantastic invasion.

"They swore aloud together—out of sheer fright, I believe—then, pretending not to know anything of my existence, turned back to the station. The sun was low; and leaning forward side by side, they seemed to be tugging painfully uphill their two ridiculous shadows of unequal length, that trailed behind them slowly over the tall grass without bending a single blade.

"In a few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver. Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt,

like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire. I was then rather excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz very soon. When I say very soon I mean it comparatively. It was just two months from the day we left the creek when we came to the bank below Kurtz's station.

"Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once—somewhere—far away—in another existence perhaps. There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had to discern, mostly by inspiration, the signs of hidden banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a look-out for the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for next day's steaming. When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality—the reality, I tell you—fades. The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily. But I felt it

all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for—what is it? half a crown a tumble—”

“Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

“I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do your tricks very well. And I didn’t do badly either, since I managed not to sink that steamboat on my first trip. It’s a wonder to me yet. Imagine a blindfolded man set to drive a van over a bad road. I sweated and shivered over that business considerably, I can tell you. After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that’s supposed to float all the time under his care is the unpardonable sin. No one may know of it, but you never forget the thump—eh? A blow on the very heart. You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night and think of it—years after—and go hot and cold all over. I don’t pretend to say that steamboat floated all the time. More than once she had to wade for a bit, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing. We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows—cannibals—in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it now. I had the manager on board and three or four pilgrims with their staves—all complete. Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the unknown, and the white men rushing out of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and surprise and welcome, seemed very strange—had the appearance of being held there captive by a spell. The word ‘ivory’ would ring in the air for a while—and on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way, reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the stern-wheel. Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging

the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on—which was just what you wanted it to do. Where the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don't know. To some place where they expected to get something, I bet! For me it crawled towards Kurtz—exclusively; but when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the woodcutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.

"The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valour, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder—the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row—is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who's that grunting? You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no—I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes—I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying

as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity—and he had filed teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this—that should the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fearfully (with an impromptu charm, made of rags, tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as a watch, stuck flatways through his lower lip), while the wooded banks slipped past us slowly, the short noise was left behind, the interminable miles of silence—and we crept on, towards Kurtz. But the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it, and thus neither that fireman nor I had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts.

“Some fifty miles below the Inner Station we came upon a hut of reeds, an inclined and melancholy pole, with the unrecognisable tatters of what had been a flag of some sort flying from it, and a neatly stacked wood-pile. This was unexpected. We came to the bank, and on the stack of firewood found a flat piece of board with some faded pencil-writing on it. When deciphered it said: ‘Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously.’ There was a signature, but it was illegible—not Kurtz—a much longer word. Hurry up. Where? Up the river? ‘Approach cautiously.’ We had not done so. But the warning could not have been meant for the place where it could be only found after approach. Something was wrong above. But what—and how much? That was the question. We commented adversely upon the imbecility of that telegraphic style. The bush around said nothing, and would not let us look very far, either. A torn curtain of

red twill hung in the doorway of the hut, and flapped sadly in our faces. The dwelling was dismantled; but we could see a white man had lived there not very long ago. There remained a rude table—a plank on two posts; a heap of rubbish reposed in a dark corner, and by the door I picked up a book. It had lost its covers, and the pages had been thumbed into a state of extremely dirty softness; but the back had been lovingly stitched afresh with white cotton thread, which looked clean yet. It was an extraordinary find. Its title was, *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*, by a man Towser, Towson—some such name—Master in His Majesty's Navy. The matter looked dreary reading enough, with illustrative diagrams and repulsive tables of figures, and the copy was sixty years old. I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands. Within, Towson or Towser was inquiring earnestly into the breaking strain of ships' chains and tackle, and other such matters. Not a very enthralling book; but at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real. Such a book being there was wonderful enough; but still more astounding were the notes pencilled in the margin, and plainly referring to the text. I couldn't believe my eyes! They were in cipher! Yes, it looked like cipher. Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it—and making notes—in cipher at that! It was an extravagant mystery.

"I had been dimly aware for some time of a worrying noise, and when I lifted my eyes I saw the wood-pile was gone, and the manager, aided by all the pilgrims, was shouting at me from the river-side. I slipped the book into my pocket. I assure you to leave off reading was like tearing myself away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship.

"I started the lame engine ahead. 'It must be this miserable trader—this intruder,' exclaimed the manager, looking back malevolently at the place we had left. 'He must be English,' I said. 'It will not save him from getting into trouble if he is not careful,' muttered the manager darkly. I observed with assumed innocence that no man was safe from trouble in this world.

"The current was more rapid now, the steamer seemed at her last gasp, the stern-wheel flopped languidly, and I caught myself listening on tiptoe for the next beat of the float,⁹ for in sober truth I expected the wretched thing to give up every moment. It was like watching the last flickers of a life. But still we crawled. Sometimes I would pick out a tree a little way ahead to measure our progress towards Kurtz by, but I lost it invariably before we got abreast. To keep the eyes so long on one thing was too much for human patience. The manager displayed a beautiful resignation. I fretted and fumed and took to arguing with myself whether or no I would talk openly with Kurtz; but before I could come to any conclusion it occurred to me that my speech or my silence, indeed any action of mine, would be a mere futility. What did it matter what any one knew or ignored? What did it matter who was manager? One gets sometimes such a flash of insight. The essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling.

"Towards the evening of the second day we judged ourselves about eight miles from Kurtz's station. I wanted to push on; but the manager looked grave, and told me the navigation up there was so dangerous that it would be advisable, the sun being very low already, to wait where we were till next morning. Moreover, he pointed out that if the warning to approach cautiously were to be followed, we must approach in daylight—not at dusk, or in the dark. This was sensible enough. Eight miles meant nearly three hours' steaming for us, and I could also see suspicious ripples at the upper end of the reach. Nevertheless, I was annoyed beyond expression at the delay, and most unreasonably too, since one night more could not matter much after so many months. As we had plenty of wood,

and caution was the word, I brought up in the middle of the stream. The reach was narrow, straight, with high sides like a railway cutting. The dusk came gliding into it long before the sun had set. The current ran smooth and swift, but a dumb immobility sat on the banks. The living trees, lashed together by the creepers and every living bush of the undergrowth, might have been changed into stone, even to the slenderest twig, to the lightest leaf. It was not sleep—it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance. Not the faintest sound of any kind could be heard. You looked on amazed, and began to suspect yourself of being deaf—then the night came suddenly, and struck you blind as well. About three in the morning some large fish leaped, and the loud splash made me jump as though a gun had been fired. When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round you like something solid. At eight or nine, perhaps, it lifted as a shutter lifts. We had a glimpse of the towering multitude of trees, of the immense matted jungle, with the blazing little ball of the sun hanging over it—all perfectly still—and then the white shutter came down again, smoothly, as if sliding in greased grooves. I ordered the chain, which we had begun to heave in, to be paid out again. Before it stopped running with a muffled rattle, a cry, a very loud cry, as of infinite desolation, soared slowly in the opaque air. It ceased. A complaining clamour, modulated in savage discords, filled our ears. The sheer unexpectedness of it made my hair stir under my cap. I don't know how it struck the others: to me it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this tumultuous and mournful uproar arise. It culminated in a hurried outbreak of almost intolerably excessive shrieking, which stopped short, leaving us stiffened in a variety of silly attitudes, and obstinately listening to the nearly as appalling and excessive silence. 'Good God! What is the meaning—?' stammered at my elbow one of the pilgrims—a little fat man, with sandy hair and red whiskers, who wore side-spring boots, and pink pyjamas tucked into his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a whole minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand

darting scared glances, with Winchesters at 'ready' in their hands. What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving, and a misty strip of water, perhaps two feet broad, around her—and that was all. The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind.

"I went forward, and ordered the chain to be hauled in short, so as to be ready to trip the anchor and move the steamboat at once if necessary. 'Will they attack?' whispered an awed voice. 'We will all be butchered in this fog,' murmured another. The faces twitched with the strain, the hands trembled slightly, the eyes forgot to wink. It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet, even those of the one or two who grinned as they hauled at the chain. Several exchanged short, grunting phrases, which seemed to settle the matter to their satisfaction. Their headman, a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. 'Catch 'im,' he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth—'catch 'im. Give 'im to us.' 'To you, eh?' I asked; 'what would you do with them?' 'Eat 'im!' he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past. They had been engaged for six months (I don't think a single one of them had any clear idea of time, as we at the end of countless ages have. They still belonged to the beginnings of time—

had no inherited experience to teach them, as it were), and of course, as long as there was a piece of paper written over in accordance with some farcical law or other made down the river, it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live. Certainly they had brought with them some rotten hippo-meat, which couldn't have lasted very long, anyway, even if the pilgrims hadn't, in the midst of a shocking hullabaloo, thrown a considerable quantity of it overboard. It looked like a high-handed proceeding; but it was really a case of legitimate self-defence. You can't breathe dead hippo waking, sleeping, and eating, and at the same time keep your precarious grip on existence. Besides that, they had given them every week three pieces of brass wire, each about nine inches long; and the theory was they were to buy their provisions with that currency in river-side villages. You can see how *that* worked. There were either no villages, or the people were hostile, or the director, who like the rest of us fed out of tins, with an occasional old he-goat thrown in, didn't want to stop the steamer for some more or less recondite reasons. So, unless they swallowed the wire itself, or made loops of it to snare the fishes with, I don't see what good their extravagant salary could be to them. I must say it was paid with a regularity worthy of a large and honourable trading company. For the rest, the only thing to eat—though it didn't look eatable in the least—I saw in their possession was a few lumps of some stuff like half-cooked dough, of a dirty lavender colour, they kept wrapped in leaves, and now and then swallowed a piece of, but so small that it seemed done more for the look of the thing than for any serious purpose of sustenance. Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us—they were thirty to five—and have a good tuck-in for once, amazes me now when I think of it. They were big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences, with courage, with strength, even yet, though their skins were no longer glossy and their muscles no longer hard. And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest—not because it occurred to me I might be eaten by them before very long, though I own to you that just

then I perceived—in a new light, as it were—how unwholesome the pilgrims looked, and I hoped, yes, I positively hoped, that my aspect was not so—what shall I say?—so—unappetising: a touch of fantastic vanity which fitted well with the dream-sensation that pervaded all my days at that time. Perhaps I had a little fever too. One can't live with one's finger everlastingly on one's pulse. I had often 'a little fever,' or a little touch of other things—the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness, the preliminary trifling before the more serious onslaught which came in due course. Yes; I looked at them as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear—or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its sombre and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly. It's really easier to face bereavement, dishonour, and the perdition of one's soul—than this kind of prolonged hunger. Sad, but true. And these chaps too had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me—the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma, a mystery greater—when I thought of it—than the curious, inexplicable note of desperate grief in this savage clamour that had swept by us on the river-bank, behind the blind whiteness of the fog.

"Two pilgrims were quarrelling in hurried whispers as to which bank. 'Left.' 'No, no; how can you? Right, right, of course.' 'It is very serious,' said the manager's voice behind me; 'I would be desolated if anything should happen to Mr Kurtz before we came up.' I looked at him, and had not the slightest doubt he was sincere. He was just

the kind of man who would wish to preserve appearances. That was his restraint. But when he muttered something about going on at once, I did not even take the trouble to answer him. I knew, and he knew, that it was impossible. Were we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air—in space. We wouldn't be able to tell where we were going to—whether up or down stream, or across—till we fetched against one bank or the other—and then we wouldn't know at first which it was. Of course I made no move. I had no mind for a smash-up. You couldn't imagine a more deadly place for a shipwreck. Whether drowned at once or not, we were sure to perish speedily in one way or another. 'I authorise you to take all the risks,' he said, after a short silence. 'I refuse to take any,' I said shortly; which was just the answer he expected, though its tone might have surprised him. 'Well, I must defer to your judgment. You are captain,' he said, with marked civility. I turned my shoulder to him in sign of my appreciation, and looked into the fog. How long would it last? It was the most hopeless lookout. The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle. 'Will they attack, do you think?' asked the manager, in a confidential tone.

"I did not think they would attack, for several obvious reasons. The thick fog was one. If they left the bank in their canoes they would get lost in it, as we would be if we attempted to move. Still, I had also judged the jungle of both banks quite impenetrable—and yet eyes were in it, eyes that had seen us. The river-side bushes were certainly very thick; but the undergrowth behind was evidently penetrable. However, during the short lift I had seen no canoes anywhere in the reach—certainly not abreast of the steamer. But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise—of the cries we had heard. They had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention. Unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if

any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence—but more generally takes the form of apathy. . . .

“You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no heart to grin, or even to revile me; but I believe they thought me gone mad—with fright, maybe. I delivered a regular lecture. My dear boys, it was no good bothering. Keep a look-out? Well, you may guess I watched the fog for the signs of lifting as a cat watches a mouse; but for anything else our eyes were of no more use to us than if we had been buried miles deep in a heap of cotton-wool. It felt like it too—choking, warm, stifling. Besides, all I said, though it sounded extravagant, was absolutely true to fact. What we afterwards alluded to as an attack was really an attempt at repulse. The action was very far from being aggressive—it was not even defensive, in the usual sense: it was undertaken under the stress of desperation, and in its essence was purely protective.

“It developed itself, I should say, two hours after the fog lifted, and its commencement was at a spot, roughly speaking, about a mile and a half below Kurtz’s station. We had just floundered and flopped round a bend, when I saw an islet, a mere grassy hummock of bright green, in the middle of the stream. It was the only thing of the kind; but as we opened the reach more, I perceived it was the head of a long sandbank, or rather of a chain of shallow patches stretching down the middle of the river. They were discoloured, just awash, and the whole lot was seen just under the water, exactly as a man’s backbone is seen running down the middle of his back under the skin. Now, as far as I did see, I could go to the right or to the left of this. I didn’t know either channel, of course. The banks looked pretty well alike, the depth appeared the same; but as I had been informed the station was on the west side, I naturally headed for the western passage.

“No sooner had we fairly entered it than I became aware it was much narrower than I had supposed. To the left of us there was the long uninterrupted shoal,¹ and to the right a high steep bank heavily overgrown with bushes. Above the bush the trees stood in serried

ranks. The twigs overhung the current thickly, and from distance to distance a large limb of some tree projected rigidly over the stream. It was then well on in the afternoon, the face of the forest was gloomy, and a broad strip of shadow had already fallen on the water. In this shadow we steamed up—very slowly, as you may imagine. I sheered her well inshore—the water being deepest near the bank, as the sounding-pole informed me.

“One of my hungry and forbearing friends was sounding in the bows just below me. This steamboat was exactly like a decked scow. On the deck there were two little teak-wood houses, with doors and windows. The boiler was in the fore-end, and the machinery right astern. Over the whole there was a light roof, supported on stanchions. The funnel projected through that roof, and in front of the funnel a small cabin built of light planks served for a pilot-house. It contained a couch, two camp-stools, a loaded Martini-Henry² leaning in one corner, a tiny table, and the steering-wheel. It had a wide door in front and a broad shutter at each side. All these were always thrown open, of course. I spent my days perched up there on the extreme fore-end of that roof, before the door. At night I slept, or tried to, on the couch. An athletic black belonging to some coast tribe, and educated by my poor predecessor, was the helmsman. He sported a pair of brass earrings, wore a blue cloth wrapper from the waist to the ankles, and thought all the world of himself. He was the most unstable kind of fool I had ever seen. He steered with no end of a swagger while you were by; but if he lost sight of you, he became instantly the prey of an abject funk, and would let that cripple of a steamboat get the upper hand of him in a minute.

“I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my poleman give up the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in. He kept hold on it though, and it trailed in the water. At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed. Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a

snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about—thick; they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house. All this time the river, the shore, the woods, were very quiet—perfectly quiet. I could only hear the heavy splashing thump of the stern-wheel and the patter of these things. We cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at! I stepped in quickly to close the shutter on the landside. That fool-helmsman, his hands on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse. Confound him! And we were staggering within ten feet of the bank. I had to lean right out to swing the heavy shutter, and I saw a face amongst the leaves on the level with my own, looking at me very fierce and steady; and then suddenly, as though a veil had been removed from my eyes, I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes—the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour. The twigs shook, swayed, and rustled, the arrows flew out of them, and then the shutter came to. ‘Steer her straight,’ I said to the helmsman. He held his head rigid, face forward; but his eyes rolled, he kept on lifting and setting down his feet gently, his mouth foamed a little. ‘Keep quiet!’ I said in a fury. I might just as well have ordered a tree not to sway in the wind. I darted out. Below me there was a great scuffle of feet on the iron deck; confused exclamations; a voice screamed, ‘Can you turn back?’ I caught sight of a V-shaped ripple on the water ahead. What? Another snag! A fusillade burst out under my feet. The pilgrims had opened with their Winchesters, and were simply squirting lead into that bush. A deuce of a lot of smoke came up and drove slowly forward. I swore at it. Now I couldn’t see the ripple or the snag either. I stood in the doorway, peering, and the arrows came in swarms. They might have been poisoned, but they looked as though they wouldn’t kill a cat. The bush began to howl. Our wood-cutters raised a warlike whoop; the report of a rifle just at my back deafened me. I glanced over my shoulder, and the pilot-house was yet full of noise and smoke when I made a dash at the wheel. The fool-nigger had dropped everything, to throw the shutter open and let off that Martini-Henry. He stood before the wide

opening, glaring, and I yelled at him to come back, while I straightened the sudden twist out of that steamboat. There was no room to turn even if I had wanted to, the snag was somewhere very near ahead in that confounded smoke, there was no time to lose, so I just crowded her into the bank—right into the bank, where I knew the water was deep.

“We tore slowly along the overhanging bushes in a whirl of broken twigs and flying leaves. The fusillade below stopped short, as I had foreseen it would when the squirts got empty. I threw my head back to a glinting whizz that traversed the pilot-house, in at one shutter-hole and out at the other. Looking past that mad helmsman, who was shaking the empty rifle and yelling at the shore, I saw vague forms of men running bent double, leaping, gliding, distinct, incomplete, evanescent. Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrenching that thing from somebody ashore he had lost his balance in the effort. The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag, and looking ahead I could see that in another hundred yards or so I would be free to sheer off, away from the bank; but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing lustre. The fusillade burst out again. He looked at me anxiously, gripping the spear like something precious, with an air of being afraid I would try to take it away from him. I had to make an effort to free my eyes from his gaze and attend to the steering. With one hand I felt above my head for the line of the steam whistle, and

jerked out screech after screech hurriedly. The tumult of angry and warlike yells was checked instantly, and then from the depths of the woods went out such a tremulous and prolonged wail of mournful fear and utter despair as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope from the earth. There was a great commotion in the bush; the shower of arrows stopped, a few dropping shots rang out sharply—then silence, in which the languid beat of the stern-wheel came plainly to my ears. I put the helm hard a-starboard at the moment when the pilgrim in pink pyjamas, very hot and agitated, appeared in the doorway. 'The manager sends me—' he began in an official tone, and stopped short. 'Good God!' he said, glaring at the wounded man.

"We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. Only in the very last moment, as though in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death-mask an inconceivably sombre, brooding, and menacing expression. The lustre of inquiring glance faded swiftly into vacant glassiness. 'Can you steer?' I asked the agent eagerly. He looked very dubious; but I made a grab at his arm, and he understood at once I meant him to steer whether or no. To tell you the truth, I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks. 'He is dead,' murmured the fellow, immensely impressed. 'No doubt about it,' said I, tugging like mad at the shoe-laces. 'And by the way, I suppose Mr Kurtz is dead as well by this time.'

"For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr Kurtz. Talking with . . . I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to—a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange

discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to myself, 'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.

"The other shoe went flying unto the devil-god of that river. I thought, By Jove! it's all over. We are too late; he has vanished—the gift has vanished, by means of some spear, arrow, or club. I will never hear that chap speak after all—and my sorrow had a startling extravagance of emotion, even such as I had noticed in the howling sorrow of these savages in the bush. I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. . . . Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever—Here, give me some tobacco." . . .

There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of the tiny flame. The match went out.

"Absurd!" he cried. "This is the worst of trying to tell . . . Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd

be—exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes? Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude. I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz. Of course I was wrong. The privilege was waiting for me. Oh yes, I heard more than enough. And I was right, too. A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard—him—it—this voice—other voices—all of them were so little more than voices—and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices—even the girl herself—now—”

He was silent for a long time.

“I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,” he began suddenly. “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. They—the women I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr Kurtz saying, ‘My Intended.’ You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this—ah—specimen was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country. ‘Mostly fossil,’ the manager had remarked disparagingly. It was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes—but evidently they couldn’t bury this parcel deep

enough to save the gifted Mr Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favour had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him—but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible—it was not good for one either—trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land—I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you?—with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil: the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil—I don't know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place—and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated.

And there, don't you see? your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain—I am trying to account to myself for—for—Mr Kurtz—for the shade of Mr Kurtz. This initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere honoured me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and—as he was good enough to say himself—his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by and by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it too. I've seen it. I've read it. It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his—let us say—nerves went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which—as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times—were offered up to him—do you understand?—to Mr Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' etc. etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence—of words—of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much

later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!' The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense came to himself, he repeatedly entreated me to take good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career. I had full information about all these things, and, besides, as it turned out, I was to have the care of his memory. I've done enough for it to give me the indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilisation. But then, you see, I can't choose. He won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not common. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witchdance in his honour; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings: he had one devoted friend at least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking. No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully—I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back—a help—an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me—I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

"Poor fool! If he had only left that shutter alone. He had no restraint, no restraint—just like Kurtz—a tree swayed by the wind. As

soon as I had put on a dry pair of slippers, I dragged him out, after first jerking the spear out of his side, which operation I confess I performed with my eyes shut tight. His heels leaped together over the little doorstep; his shoulders were pressed to my breast; I hugged him from behind desperately. Oh! he was heavy, heavy; heavier than any man on earth, I should imagine. Then without more ado I tipped him overboard. The current snatched him as though he had been a wisp of grass, and I saw the body roll over twice before I lost sight of it for ever. All the pilgrims and the manager were then congregated on the awning-deck about the pilot-house, chattering at each other like a flock of excited magpies, and there was a scandalised murmur at my heartless promptitude. What they wanted to keep that body hanging about for I can't guess. Embalm it, maybe. But I had also heard another, and a very ominous, murmur on the deck below. My friends the wood-cutters were likewise scandalised, and with a better show of reason—though I admit that the reason itself was quite inadmissible. Oh, quite! I had made up my mind that if my late helmsman was to be eaten, the fishes alone should have him. He had been a very second-rate helmsman while alive, but now he was dead he might have become a first-class temptation, and possibly cause some startling trouble. Besides, I was anxious to take the wheel, the man in pink pyjamas showing himself a hopeless duffer at the business.

"This I did directly the simple funeral was over. We were going half-speed, keeping right in the middle of the stream, and I listened to the talk about me. They had given up Kurtz, they had given up the station; Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt—and so on—and so on. The red-haired pilgrim was beside himself with the thought that at least this poor Kurtz had been properly revenged. 'Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?' He positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar.³ And he had nearly fainted when he saw the wounded man! I could not help saying, 'You made a glorious lot of smoke, anyhow.' I had seen, from the way the tops of the bushes rustled and flew, that almost all the shots had gone too high. You

can't hit anything unless you take aim and fire from the shoulder; but these chaps fired from the hip with their eyes shut. The retreat, I maintained—and I was right—was caused by the screeching of the steam-whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.

"The manager stood by the wheel murmuring confidentially about the necessity of getting well away down the river before dark at all events, when I saw in the distance a clearing on the river-side and the outlines of some sort of building. 'What's this?' I asked. He clapped his hands in wonder. 'The station!' he cried. I edged in at once, still going half-speed.

"Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no enclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half a dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that. The river-bank was clear, and on the water side I saw a white man under a hat like a cart-wheel beckoning persistently with his whole arm. Examining the edge of the forest above and below, I was almost certain I could see movements—human forms gliding here and there. I steamed past prudently, then stopped the engines and let her drift down. The man on the shore began to shout, urging us to land. 'We have been attacked,' screamed the manager. 'I know—I know. It's all right,' yelled back the other, as cheerful as you please. 'Come along. It's all right. I am glad.'

"His aspect reminded me of something I had seen—something funny I had seen somewhere. As I manoeuvred to get alongside, I was asking myself, 'What does this fellow look like?' Suddenly I got it. He looked like a harlequin.⁴ His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland⁵ probably, but it was covered with

patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow—patches on the back, patches on the front, patches on elbows, on knees; coloured binding round his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. A beardless, boyish face, very fair, no features to speak of, nose peeling, little blue eyes, smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow on a wind-swept plain. 'Look out, captain!' he cried; 'there's a snag lodged in here last night.' What! Another snag? I confess I swore shamefully. I had nearly holed my cripple, to finish off that charming trip. The harlequin on the bank turned his little pug nose up to me. 'You English?' he asked, all smiles. 'Are you?' I shouted from the wheel. The smiles vanished, and he shook his head as if sorry for my disappointment. Then he brightened up. 'Never mind!' he cried encouragingly. 'Are we in time?' I asked. 'He is up there,' he replied, with a toss of the head up the hill, and becoming gloomy all of a sudden. His face was like the autumn sky, overcast one moment and bright the next.

"When the manager, escorted by the pilgrims, all of them armed to the teeth, had gone to the house, this chap came on board. 'I say, I don't like this. These natives are in the bush,' I said. He assured me earnestly it was all right. 'They are simple people,' he added; 'well, I am glad you came. It took me all my time to keep them off.' 'But you said it was all right,' I cried. 'Oh, they meant no harm,' he said; and as I stared he corrected himself, 'Not exactly.' Then vivaciously, 'My faith, your pilot-house wants a clean up!' In the next breath he advised me to keep enough steam on the boiler to blow the whistle in case of any trouble. 'One good screech will do more for you than all your rifles. They are simple people,' he repeated. He rattled away at such a rate he quite overwhelmed me. He seemed to be trying to make up for lots of silence, and actually hinted, laughing, that such was the case. 'Don't you talk with Mr Kurtz?' I said. 'You don't talk with that man—you listen to him,' he exclaimed with severe exaltation. 'But now—' He waved his arm, and in the

twinkling of an eye was in the uttermost depths of despondency. In a moment he came up again with a jump, possessed himself of both my hands, shook them continuously, while he gabbled: 'Brother sailor . . . honour . . . pleasure . . . delight . . . introduce myself . . . Russian . . . son of an arch-priest . . . Government of Tambov . . . What? Tobacco! English tobacco; the excellent English tobacco! Now, that's brotherly. Smoke? Where's a sailor that does not smoke?'

"The pipe soothed him, and gradually I made out he had run away from school, had gone to sea in a Russian ship; ran away again; served some time in English ships; was now reconciled with the arch-priest. He made a point of that. 'But when one is young one must see things, gather experience, ideas; enlarge the mind.' 'Here!' I interrupted. 'You can never tell! Here I met Mr Kurtz,' he said, youthfully solemn and reproachful. I held my tongue after that. It appears he had persuaded a Dutch trading-house on the coast to fit him out with stores and goods, and had started for the interior with a light heart, and no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby. He had been wandering about that river for nearly two years alone, cut off from everybody and everything. 'I am not so young as I look. I am twenty-five,' he said. 'At first old Van Shuyten would tell me to go to the devil,' he narrated with keen enjoyment; 'but I stuck to him, and talked and talked, till at last he got afraid I would talk the hind-leg off his favourite dog, so he gave me some cheap things and a few guns, and told me he hoped he would never see my face again. Good old Dutchman, Van Shuyten. I sent him one small lot of ivory a year ago, so that he can't call me a little thief when I get back. I hope he got it. And for the rest I don't care. I had some wood stacked for you. That was my old house. Did you see?'

"I gave him Towson's book. He made as though he would kiss me, but restrained himself. 'The only book I had left, and I thought I had lost it,' he said, looking at it ecstatically. 'So many accidents happen to a man going about alone, you know. Canoes get upset sometimes—and sometimes you've got to clear out so quick when the people get angry.' He thumbed the pages. 'You made notes in Russian?' I asked. He nodded. 'I thought they were written in cipher,'

I said. He laughed, then became serious. 'I had lots of trouble to keep these people off,' he said. 'Did they want to kill you?' I asked. 'Oh no!' he cried, and checked himself. 'Why did they attack us?' I pursued. He hesitated, then said shamefacedly, 'They don't want him to go.' 'Don't they?' I said curiously. He nodded a nod full of mystery and wisdom. 'I tell you,' he cried, 'this man has enlarged my mind.' He opened his arms wide, staring at me with his little blue eyes that were perfectly round."

Endnotes

- Note 8:
Literal rendering of the French *J'ai fait mon possible* (I have done all I could). Conrad sprinkles the conversation of his Belgian characters with Gallicisms to remind us that their words, though reported in English, were spoken in French. Other examples are "a species of wandering trader" (above), "Conceive you" (below), "I would be desolated" (p. 100).
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Automatic water-level regulator opening and closing a water-supply valve.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sandbank.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rifle combining the seven-grooved barrel of the Scottish gun maker A. Henry with the block-action breech mechanism introduced by the Swiss inventor F. Martini.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Little redheaded rascal.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Character from Italian comedy traditionally dressed in multicolored clothes.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Coarse linen fabric.[Return to reference 5](#)

3

"I looked at him, lost in astonishment. There he was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes, enthusiastic, fabulous. His very existence was improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering. He was an insoluble problem. It was inconceivable how he had existed, how he had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain—why he did not instantly disappear. 'I went a little farther,' he said, 'then still a little farther—till I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back. Never mind. Plenty time. I can manage. You take Kurtz away quick—quick—I tell you.' The glamour of youth enveloped his particoloured rags, his destitution, his loneliness, the essential desolation of his futile wanderings. For months—for years—his life hadn't been worth a day's purchase; and there he was gallantly, thoughtlessly alive, to all appearance indestructible solely by the virtue of his few years and of his unreflecting audacity. I was seduced into something like admiration—like envy. Glamour urged him on, glamour kept him unscathed. He surely wanted nothing from the wilderness but space to breathe in and to push on through. His need was to exist, and to move onwards at the greatest possible risk, and with a maximum of privation. If the absolutely pure, uncalculating, unpractical spirit of adventure had ever ruled a human being, it ruled this be-patched youth. I almost envied him the possession of this modest and clear flame. It seemed to have consumed all thought of self so completely, that, even while he was talking to you, you forgot that it was he—the man before your eyes—who had gone through these things. I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. He had not meditated over it. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism. I must say that to me it appeared about the most dangerous thing in every way he had come upon so far.

"They had come together unavoidably, like two ships becalmed near each other, and lay rubbing sides at last. I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a certain occasion, when

encamped in the forest, they had talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked. 'We talked of everything,' he said, quite transported at the recollection. 'I forgot there was such a thing as sleep. The night did not seem to last an hour. Everything! Everything! . . . Of love too.' 'Ah, he talked to you of love!' I said, much amused. 'It isn't what you think,' he cried, almost passionately. 'It was in general. He made me see things—things.'

"He threw his arms up. We were on deck at the time, and the head-man of my wood-cutters, lounging near by, turned upon him his heavy and glittering eyes. I looked around, and I don't know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness. 'And, ever since, you have been with him, of course?' I said.

"On the contrary. It appears their intercourse had been very much broken by various causes. He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses (he alluded to it as you would to some risky feat), but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone, far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up,' he said. 'Ah, it was worth waiting for!—sometimes.' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?' I asked. 'Oh yes, of course'; he had discovered lots of villages, a lake too—he did not know exactly in what direction; it was dangerous to inquire too much—but mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. 'But he had no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected. 'There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, looking away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered something about the villages round that lake. 'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at him searchingly. It was curious to see his mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions. 'What can you expect?' he burst out;

'he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know—and they had never seen anything like it—and very terrible. He could be very terrible. You can't judge Mr Kurtz as you would an ordinary man. No, no, no! Now—just to give you an idea—I don't mind telling you, he wanted to shoot me too one day—but I don't judge him.' 'Shoot you!' I cried. 'What for?' 'Well, I had a small lot of ivory the chief of that village near my house gave me. You see I used to shoot game for them. Well, he wanted it, and wouldn't hear reason. He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country, because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased. And it was true too. I gave him the ivory. What did I care! But I didn't clear out. No, no. I couldn't leave him. I had to be careful, of course, till we got friendly again for a time. He had his second illness then. Afterwards I had to keep out of the way; but I didn't mind. He was living for the most part in those villages on the lake. When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me, and sometimes it was better for me to be careful. This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away. When I had a chance I begged him to try and leave while there was time; I offered to go back with him. And he would say yes, and then he would remain; go off on another ivory hunt; disappear for weeks; forget himself amongst these people—forget himself—you know.' 'Why! he's mad,' I said. He protested indignantly. Mr Kurtz couldn't be mad. If I had heard him talk, only two days ago, I wouldn't dare hint at such a thing. . . . I had taken up my binoculars while we talked, and was looking at the shore, sweeping the limit of the forest at each side and at the back of the house. The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet—as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the hill—made me uneasy. There was no sign on the face of nature of this amazing tale that was not so much told as suggested to me in desolate exclamations, completed by shrugs, in interrupted phrases, in hints ending in deep sighs. The woods were unmoved, like a mask—heavy, like the closed door of a prison—they looked with their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation, of unapproachable

silence. The Russian was explaining to me that it was only lately that Mr Kurtz had come down to the river, bringing along with him all the fighting men of that lake tribe. He had been absent for several months—getting himself adored, I suppose—and had come down unexpectedly, with the intention to all appearance of making a raid either across the river or down stream. Evidently the appetite for more ivory had got the better of the—what shall I say?—less material aspirations. However, he had got much worse suddenly. ‘I heard he was lying helpless, and so I came up—took my chance,’ said the Russian. ‘Oh, he is bad, very bad.’ I directed my glass to the house. There were no signs of life, but there was the ruined roof, the long mud wall peeping above the grass, with three little square window-holes, no two of the same size; all this brought within reach of my hand, as it were. And then I made a brusque movement, and one of the remaining posts of that vanished fence leaped up in the field of my glass. You remember I told you I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view, and its first result was to make me throw my head back as if before a blow. Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing—food for thought and also for the vultures if there had been any looking down from the sky; but at all events for such ants as were industrious enough to ascend the pole. They would have been even more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house. Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise. I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen—and there it was, black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids—a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and, with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth, was smiling too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber.

"I am not disclosing any trade secrets. In fact the manager said afterwards that Mr Kurtz's methods had ruined the district. I have no opinion on that point, but I want you clearly to understand that there was nothing exactly profitable in these heads being there. They only show that Mr Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him—some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last—only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . I put down the glass, and the head that had appeared near enough to be spoken to seemed at once to have leaped away from me into inaccessible distance.

"The admirer of Mr Kurtz was a bit crestfallen. In a hurried, indistinct voice he began to assure me he had not dared to take these—say, symbols—down. He was not afraid of the natives; they would not stir till Mr Kurtz gave the word. His ascendancy was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl . . . 'I don't want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr Kurtz,' I shouted. Curious, this feeling that came over me that such details would be more intolerable than those heads drying on the stakes under Mr Kurtz's windows. After all, that was only a savage sight, while I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist—obviously—in the sunshine. The young man looked at me with surprise. I suppose it did not occur to him that Mr Kurtz was no idol of mine. He forgot I hadn't heard any of these splendid monologues on, what was it? on love, justice, conduct of

life—or what not. If it had come to crawling before Mr Kurtz, he crawled as much as the veriest savage of them all. I had no idea of the conditions, he said: these heads were the heads of rebels. I shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers—and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks. ‘You don’t know how such a life tries a man like Kurtz,’ cried Kurtz’s last disciple. ‘Well, and you?’ I said. ‘I! I! I am a simple man. I have no great thoughts. I want nothing from anybody. How can you compare me to . . . ?’ His feelings were too much for speech, and suddenly he broke down. ‘I don’t understand,’ he groaned. ‘I’ve been doing my best to keep him alive, and that’s enough. I had no hand in all this. I have no abilities. There hasn’t been a drop of medicine or a mouthful of invalid food for months here. He was shamefully abandoned. A man like this, with such ideas. Shamefully! Shamefully! I—I—haven’t slept for the last ten nights. . . .’

“His voice lost itself in the calm of the evening. The long shadows of the forest had slipped down hill while we talked, had gone far beyond the ruined hovel, beyond the symbolic row of stakes. All this was in the gloom, while we down there were yet in the sunshine, and the stretch of the river abreast of the clearing glittered in a still and dazzling splendour, with a murky and overshadowed bend above and below. Not a living soul was seen on the shore. The bushes did not rustle.

“Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of men appeared, as though they had come up from the ground. They waded waist-deep in the grass, in a compact body, bearing an improvised stretcher in their midst. Instantly, in the emptiness of the landscape, a cry arose whose shrillness pierced the still air like a sharp arrow flying straight to the very heart of the land; and, as if by enchantment, streams of human beings—of naked human beings—with spears in their hands, with bows, with shields, with wild glances and savage movements, were poured into the clearing by the dark-

faced and pensive forest. The bushes shook, the grass swayed for a time, and then everything stood still in attentive immobility.

" 'Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for,' said the Russian at my elbow. The knot of men with the stretcher had stopped too, half-way to the steamer, as if petrified. I saw the man on the stretcher sit up, lank and with an uplifted arm, above the shoulders of the bearers. 'Let us hope that the man who can talk so well of love in general will find some particular reason to spare us this time,' I said. I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonouring necessity. I could not hear a sound, but through my glasses I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. Kurtz—Kurtz—that means 'short' in German—don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life—and death. He looked at least seven feet long. His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide—it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. He fell back suddenly. The stretcher shook as the bearers staggered forward again, and almost at the same time I noticed that the crowd of savages was vanishing without any perceptible movement of retreat, as if the forest that had ejected these beings so suddenly had drawn them in again as the breath is drawn in a long aspiration.

"Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms—two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine—the thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter. The manager bent over him murmuring as he walked beside his head. They laid him down in one of the little cabins—just a room for a bedplace and a camp-stool or

two, you know. We had brought his belated correspondence, and a lot of torn envelopes and open letters littered his bed. His hand roamed feebly amongst these papers. I was struck by the fire of his eyes and the composed languor of his expression. It was not so much the exhaustion of disease. He did not seem in pain. This shadow looked satiated and calm, as though for the moment it had had its fill of all the emotions.

"He rustled one of the letters, and looking straight in my face said, 'I am glad.' Somebody had been writing to him about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him—factitious no doubt—to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.

"The manager appeared silently in the doorway; I stepped out at once and he drew the curtain after me. The Russian, eyed curiously by the pilgrims, was staring at the shore. I followed the direction of his glance.

"Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic head-dresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

"She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her

deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

"She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

"She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared.

" 'If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her,' said the man of patches nervously. 'I had been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn't decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don't understand. . . . No—it's too much for me. Ah, well, it's all over now.'

"At this moment I heard Kurtz's deep voice behind the curtain: 'Save me!—save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save *me*! Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I'll carry my ideas out yet—I will return. I'll show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions—you are interfering with me. I will return. I . . .'

"The manager came out. He did me the honour to take me under the arm and lead me aside. 'He is very low, very low,' he said. He considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful. 'We have done all we could for him—haven't we? But there is no disguising the fact, Mr Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company. He did not see the time was not ripe for vigorous action. Cautiously, cautiously—that's my principle. We must be cautious yet. The district is closed to us for a time. Deplorable! Upon the whole, the trade will suffer. I don't deny there is a remarkable quantity of ivory—mostly fossil. We must save it, at all events—but look how precarious the position is—and why? Because the method is unsound.' 'Do you,' said I, looking at the shore, 'call it "unsound method"?' 'Without doubt,' he exclaimed hotly, 'Don't you?' . . . 'No method at all,' I murmured after a while. 'Exactly,' he exulted. 'I anticipated this. Shows a complete want of judgment. It is my duty to point it out in the proper quarter.' 'Oh,' said I, 'that fellow—what's his name?—the brickmaker, will make a readable report for you.' He appeared confounded for a moment. It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief—positively for relief. 'Nevertheless, I think Mr Kurtz is a remarkable man,' I said with emphasis. He started, dropped on me a cold heavy glance, said very quietly, 'He *was*,' and turned his back on me. My hour of favour was over; I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods for which the time was not ripe: I was unsound! Ah! but it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares.

"I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr Kurtz, who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried. And for a moment it

seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night. . . . The Russian tapped me on the shoulder. I heard him mumbling and stammering something about 'brother seaman—couldn't conceal—knowledge of matters that would affect Mr Kurtz's reputation.' I waited. For him evidently Mr Kurtz was not in his grave; I suspect that for him Mr Kurtz was one of the immortals. 'Well!' said I at last, 'speak out. As it happens, I am Mr Kurtz's friend—in a way.'

"He stated with a good deal of formality that had we not been 'of the same profession,' he would have kept the matter to himself without regard to consequences. He suspected 'there was an active ill-will towards him on the part of these white men that—' 'You are right,' I said, remembering a certain conversation I had overheard. 'The manager thinks you ought to be hanged.' He showed a concern at this intelligence which amused me at first. 'I had better get out of the way quietly,' he said earnestly. 'I can do no more for Kurtz now, and they would soon find some excuse. What's to stop them? There's a military post three hundred miles from here.' 'Well, upon my word,' said I, 'perhaps you had better go if you have any friends amongst the savages near by.' 'Plenty,' he said. 'They are simple people—and I want nothing, you know.' He stood biting his lip, then: 'I don't want any harm to happen to these whites here, but of course I was thinking of Mr Kurtz's reputation—but you are a brother seaman and—' 'All right,' said I, after a time. 'Mr Kurtz's reputation is safe with me.' I did not know how truly I spoke.

"He informed me, lowering his voice, that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer. 'He hated sometimes the idea of being taken away—and then again . . . But I don't understand these matters. I am a simple man. He thought it would scare you away—that you would give it up, thinking him dead. I could not stop him. Oh, I had an awful time of it this last month.' 'Very well,' I said. 'He is all right now.' 'Ye-e-es,' he muttered, not very convinced apparently. 'Thanks,' said I; 'I shall keep my eyes

open.' 'But quiet—eh?' he urged anxiously. 'It would be awful for his reputation if anybody here—' I promised a complete discretion with great gravity. 'I have a canoe and three black fellows waiting not very far. I am off. Could you give me a few Martini-Henry cartridges?' I could, and did, with proper secrecy. He helped himself, with a wink at me, to a handful of my tobacco. 'Between sailors—you know—good English tobacco.' At the door of the pilot-house he turned round—'I say, haven't you a pair of shoes you could spare?' He raised one leg. 'Look.' The soles were tied with knotted strings sandal-wise under his bare feet. I rooted out an old pair, at which he looked with admiration before tucking it under his left arm. One of his pockets (bright red) was bulging with cartridges, from the other (dark blue) peeped 'Towson's Inquiry,' etc. etc. He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. 'Ah! I'll never, never meet such a man again. You ought to have heard him recite poetry—his own too it was, he told me. Poetry!' He rolled his eyes at the recollection of these delights. 'Oh, he enlarged my mind!' 'Good-bye,' said I. He shook hands and vanished in the night. Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him—whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon! . . .

"When I woke up shortly after midnight his warning came to my mind with its hint of danger that seemed, in the starred darkness, real enough to make me get up for the purpose of having a look round. On the hill a big fire burned, illuminating fitfully a crooked corner of the station-house. One of the agents with a picket of a few of our blacks, armed for the purpose, was keeping guard over the ivory; but deep within the forest, red gleams that wavered, that seemed to sink and rise from the ground amongst confused columnar shapes of intense blackness, showed the exact position of the camp where Mr Kurtz's adorers were keeping their uneasy vigil. The monotonous beating of a big drum filled the air with muffled shocks and a lingering vibration. A steady droning sound of many men chanting each to himself some weird incantation came out from the black, flat wall of the woods as the humming of bees comes out

of a hive, and had a strange narcotic effect upon my half-awake senses. I believe I dozed off leaning over the rail, till an abrupt burst of yells, an overwhelming outbreak of a pent-up and mysterious frenzy, woke me up in a bewildered wonder. It was cut short all at once, and the low droning went on with an effect of audible and soothing silence. I glanced casually into the little cabin. A light was burning within, but Mr Kurtz was not there.

"I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at first—the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was—how shall I define it?—the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much, that I did not raise an alarm.

"There was an agent buttoned up inside an ulster⁶ and sleeping on a chair on deck within three feet of me. The yells had not awakened him; he snored very slightly; I left him to his slumbers and leaped ashore. I did not betray Mr Kurtz—it was ordered I should never betray him—it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice. I was anxious to deal with this shadow by myself alone—and to this day I don't know why I was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience.

"As soon as I got on the bank I saw a trail—a broad trail through the grass. I remember the exultation with which I said to myself, 'He can't walk—he is crawling on all-fours—I've got him.' The grass was wet with dew. I strode rapidly with clenched fists. I fancy I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing. I don't know. I had some imbecile thoughts. The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory as a most improper

person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair. I saw a row of pilgrims squirting lead in the air out of Winchesters held to the hip. I thought I would never get back to the steamer, and imagined myself living alone and unarmed in the woods to an advanced age. Such silly things—you know. And I remember I confounded the beat of the drum with the beating of my heart, and was pleased at its calm regularity.

"I kept to the track though—then stopped to listen. The night was very clear; a dark blue space, sparkling with dew and starlight, in which black things stood very still. I thought I could see a kind of motion ahead of me. I was strangely cocksure of everything that night. I actually left the track and ran in a wide semicircle (I verily believe chuckling to myself) so as to get in front of that stir, of that motion I had seen—if indeed I had seen anything. I was circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game.

"I came upon him, and, if he had not heard me coming, I would have fallen over him too, but he got up in time. He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest. I had cut him off cleverly; but when actually confronting him I seemed to come to my senses, I saw the danger in its right proportion. It was by no means over yet. Suppose he began to shout? Though he could hardly stand, there was still plenty of vigour in his voice. 'Go away—hide yourself,' he said, in that profound tone. It was very awful. I glanced back. We were within thirty yards of the nearest fire. A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns—antelope horns, I think—on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough. 'Do you know what you are doing?' I whispered. 'Perfectly,' he answered, raising his voice for that single word: it sounded to me far off and yet loud, like a hail through a speaking-trumpet. If he makes a row we are lost, I thought to myself. This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow—this

wandering and tormented thing. 'You will be lost,' I said—'utterly lost.' One gets sometimes such a flash of inspiration, you know. I did say the right thing, though indeed he could not have been more irretrievably lost than he was at this very moment, when the foundations of our intimacy were being laid—to endure—to endure—even to the end—even beyond.

" 'I had immense plans,' he muttered irresolutely. 'Yes,' said I; 'but if you try to shout I'll smash your head with—' There was not a stick or a stone near. 'I will throttle you for good,' I corrected myself. 'I was on the threshold of great things,' he pleaded, in a voice of longing, with a wistfulness of tone that made my blood run cold. 'And now for this stupid scoundrel—' 'Your success in Europe is assured in any case,' I affirmed steadily. I did not want to have the throttling of him, you understand—and indeed it would have been very little use for any practical purpose. I tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations. And, don't you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head—though I had a very lively sense of that danger too—but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. I've been telling you what we said—repeating the phrases we pronounced—but what's the good? They were common everyday words—the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of

words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man. And I wasn't arguing with a lunatic either. Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear—concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear; and therein was my only chance—barring, of course, the killing him there and then, which wasn't so good, on account of unavoidable noise. But his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had—for my sins, I suppose, to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself too. I saw it—I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. I kept my head pretty well; but when I had him at last stretched on the couch, I wiped my forehead, while my legs shook under me as though I had carried half a ton on my back down that hill. And yet I had only supported him, his bony arm clasped round my neck—and he was not much heavier than a child.

"When next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung downstream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the fierce river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a mangy skin with a pendent tail—something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and

the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany.

"We had carried Kurtz into the pilot-house: there was more air there. Lying on the couch, he stared through the open shutter. There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream. She put out her hands, shouted something, and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance.

" 'Do you understand this?' I asked.

"He kept on looking out past me with fiery, longing eyes, with a mingled expression of wistfulness and hate. He made no answer, but I saw a smile, a smile of indefinable meaning, appear on his colourless lips that a moment after twitched convulsively. 'Do I not?' he said slowly, gasping, as if the words had been torn out of him by a supernatural power.

"I pulled the string of the whistle, and I did this because I saw the pilgrims on deck getting out their rifles with an air of anticipating a jolly lark. At the sudden screech there was a movement of abject terror through that wedged mass of bodies. 'Don't! don't you frighten them away,' cried some one on deck disconsolately. I pulled the string time after time. They broke and ran, they leaped, they crouched, they swerved, they dodged the flying terror of the sound. The three red chaps had fallen flat, face down on the shore, as though they had been shot dead. Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch, and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the sombre and glittering river.

"And then that imbecile crowd down on the deck started their little fun, and I could see nothing more for smoke.

"The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress; and Kurtz's life was running swiftly too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time. The manager was very placid, he had no vital anxieties now, he took us both in with a comprehensive and satisfied glance: the 'affair' had come off

as well as could be wished. I saw the time approaching when I would be left alone of the party of 'unsound method.' The pilgrims looked upon me with disfavour. I was, so to speak, numbered with the dead. It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the tenebrous land invaded by these mean and greedy phantoms.

"Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart. Oh, he struggled! he struggled! The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now—images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression. My Intended, my station, my career, my ideas—these were the subjects for the occasional utterances of elevated sentiments. The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham, whose fate it was to be buried presently in the mould of primeval earth. But both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for the possession of that soul satiated with primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power.

"Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. 'You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he would say. 'Of course you must take care of the motives—right motives—always.' The long reaches that were like one and the same reach, monotonous bends that were exactly alike, slipped past the steamer with their multitude of secular² trees looking patiently after this grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings. I looked ahead—piloting. 'Close the shutter,' said Kurtz suddenly one day; 'I can't bear to look at this.' I did so. There was a silence. 'Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness.

"We broke down—as I had expected—and had to lie up for repairs at the head of an island. This delay was the first thing that shook Kurtz's confidence. One morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph—the lot tied together with a shoe-string. 'Keep this for me,' he said. 'This noxious fool' (meaning the manager) 'is capable of prying into my boxes when I am not looking.' In the afternoon I saw him. He was lying on his back with closed eyes, and I withdrew quietly, but I heard him mutter, 'Live rightly, die, die . . .' I listened. There was nothing more. Was he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a fragment of a phrase from some newspaper article? He had been writing for the papers and meant to do so again, 'for the furthering of my ideas. It's a duty.'

"His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines. But I had not much time to give him, because I was helping the engine-driver to take to pieces the leaky cylinders, to straighten a bent connecting-rod, and in other such matters. I lived in an infernal mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills—things I abominate, because I don't get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap—unless I had the shakes too bad to stand.

"One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.' The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, 'Oh, nonsense!' and stood over him as if transfixed.

"Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a

whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath:

“ ‘The horror! The horror!’

“I blew the candle out and left the cabin. The pilgrims were dining in the mess-room, and I took my place opposite the manager, who lifted his eyes to give me a questioning glance, which I successfully ignored. He leaned back, serene, with that peculiar smile of his sealing the unexpressed depths of his meanness. A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces. Suddenly the manager’s boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt:

“ ‘Mistah Kurtz—he dead.’

“All the pilgrims rushed out to see. I remained, and went on with my dinner. I believe I was considered brutally callous. However, I did not eat much. There was a lamp in there—light, don’t you know—and outside it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.

“And then they very nearly buried me.

“However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle

than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair's-breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up—he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth—the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best—a vision of greyness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless contempt for the evanescence of all things—even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! I like to think my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry—much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal.

"No, they did not bury me, though there is a period of time which I remember mistily, with a shuddering wonder, like a passage through some inconceivable world that had no hope in it and no desire. I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from

each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance. I daresay I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets—there were various affairs to settle—grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behaviour was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt's endeavours to 'nurse up my strength' seemed altogether beside the mark. It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing. I kept the bundle of papers given me by Kurtz, not knowing exactly what to do with it. His mother had died lately, watched over, as I was told, by his Intended. A clean-shaven man, with an official manner and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, called on me one day and made inquiries, at first circuitous, afterwards suavely pressing, about what he was pleased to denominate certain 'documents.' I was not surprised, because I had had two rows with the manager on the subject out there. I had refused to give up the smallest scrap out of that package, and I took the same attitude with the spectacled man. He became darkly menacing at last, and with much heat argued that the Company had the right to every bit of information about its 'territories.' And, said he, 'Mr Kurtz's knowledge of unexplored regions must have been necessarily extensive and peculiar—owing to his great abilities and to the deplorable circumstances in which he had been placed: therefore—' I assured him Mr Kurtz's knowledge, however extensive, did not bear upon the problems of commerce or administration. He invoked then the name of science. 'It would be an incalculable loss if,' etc. etc. I offered him the report on the 'Suppression of Savage Customs,' with

the postscriptum torn off. He took it up eagerly, but ended by sniffing at it with an air of contempt. 'This is not what we had a right to expect,' he remarked. 'Expect nothing else,' I said. 'There are only private letters.' He withdrew upon some threat of legal proceedings, and I saw him no more; but another fellow, calling himself Kurtz's cousin, appeared two days later, and was anxious to hear all the details about his dear relative's last moments. Incidentally he gave me to understand that Kurtz had been essentially a great musician. 'There was the making of an immense success,' said the man, who was an organist, I believe, with lank grey hair flowing over a greasy coat-collar. I had no reason to doubt his statement; and to this day I am unable to say what was Kurtz's profession, whether he ever had any—which was the greatest of his talents. I had taken him for a painter who wrote for the papers, or else for a journalist who could paint—but even the cousin (who took snuff during the interview) could not tell me what he had been—exactly. He was a universal genius—on that point I agreed with the old chap, who thereupon blew his nose noisily into a large cotton handkerchief and withdrew in senile agitation, bearing off some family letters and memoranda without importance. Ultimately a journalist anxious to know something of the fate of his 'dear colleague' turned up. This visitor informed me Kurtz's proper sphere ought to have been politics 'on the popular side.' He had furry straight eyebrows, bristly hair cropped short, an eyeglass on a broad ribbon, and, becoming expansive, confessed his opinion that Kurtz really couldn't write a bit—'but heavens! how that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. He had faith—don't you see?—he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything—anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.' 'What party?' I asked. 'Any party,' answered the other. 'He was an—an—extremist.' Did I not think so? I assented. Did I know, he asked, with a sudden flash of curiosity, 'what it was that had induced him to go out there?' 'Yes,' said I, and forthwith handed him the famous Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judged 'it would do,' and took himself off with this plunder.

"Thus I was left at last with a slim packet of letters and the girl's portrait. She struck me as beautiful—I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the sunlight can be made to lie too, yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself. I concluded I would go and give her back her portrait and those letters myself. Curiosity? Yes; and also some other feeling perhaps. All that had been Kurtz's had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended—and I wanted to give that up too to the past, in a way—to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate. I don't defend myself. I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfilment of one of those ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went.

"I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man's life—a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passage; but before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived—a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me—the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart—the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to

keep back alone for the salvation of another soul. And the memory of what I had heard him say afar there, with the horned shapes stirring at my back, in the glow of fires, within the patient woods, those broken phrases came back to me, were heard again in their ominous and terrifying simplicity. I remembered his abject pleading, his abject threats, the colossal scale of his vile desires, the meanness, the torment, the tempestuous anguish of his soul. And later on I seemed to see his collected languid manner, when he said one day, 'This lot of ivory now is really mine. The Company did not pay for it. I collected it myself at a very great personal risk. I am afraid they will try to claim it as theirs though. H'm. It is a difficult case. What do you think I ought to do—resist? Eh? I want no more than justice.' . . . He wanted no more than justice—no more than justice. I rang the bell before a mahogany door on the first floor, and while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glossy panel—stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!'

"The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened—closed. I rose.

"She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, 'I had heard you were coming.' I noticed she was not very young—I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from

which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, I—I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves. But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me too he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time—his death and her sorrow—I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together—I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, ‘I have survived’; while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. She motioned me to a chair. We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it. . . . ‘You knew him well,’ she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

“ ‘Intimacy grows quickly out there,’ I said. ‘I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.’

“ ‘And you admired him,’ she said. ‘It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?’

“ ‘He was a remarkable man,’ I said unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, ‘It was impossible not to—’

“ ‘Love him,’ she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. ‘How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.’

“ ‘You knew him best,’ I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her

forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love.

" 'You were his friend,' she went on. 'His friend,' she repeated, a little louder. 'You must have been, if he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I can speak to you—and oh! I must speak. I want you—you who have heard his last words—to know I have been worthy of him. . . . It is not pride. . . . Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than any one on earth—he told me so himself. And since his mother died I have had no one—no one—to—to—'

"I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink. I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He wasn't rich enough or something. And indeed I don't know whether he had not been a pauper all his life. He had given me some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there.

" '. . . Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?' she was saying. 'He drew men towards him by what was best in them.' She looked at me with intensity. 'It is the gift of the great,' she went on, and the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard—the ripple of the river, the sighing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of the crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness. 'But you have heard him! You know!' she cried.

" 'Yes, I know,' I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her—from which I could not even defend myself.

" 'What a loss to me—to us!'—she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, 'To the world.' By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears—of tears that would not fall.

" 'I have been very happy—very fortunate—very proud,' she went on. 'Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for—for life.'

"She stood up; her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. I rose too.

" 'And of all this,' she went on mournfully, 'of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains—nothing but a memory. You and I—'

" 'We shall always remember him,' I said hastily.

" 'No!' she cried. 'It is impossible that all this should be lost—that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing—but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too—I could not perhaps understand—but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died.'

" 'His words will remain,' I said.

" 'And his example,' she whispered to herself. 'Men looked up to him—his goodness shone in every act. His example—'

" 'True,' I said; 'his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.'

" 'But I do not. I cannot—I cannot believe—not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.'

"She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him! I saw him clearly enough then. I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness. She said suddenly very low, 'He died as he lived.'

" 'His end,' said I, with dull anger stirring in me, 'was in every way worthy of his life.'

" 'And I was not with him,' she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity.

" 'Everything that could be done—' I mumbled.

" 'Ah, but I believed in him more than any one on earth—more than his own mother, more than—himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance.'

"I felt like a chill grip on my chest. 'Don't,' I said, in a muffled voice.

" 'Forgive me. I—I—have mourned so long in silence—in silence. . . . You were with him—to the last? I think of his loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps no one to hear. . . .'

" 'To the very end,' I said shakily. 'I heard his very last words. . . .' I stopped in a fright.

" 'Repeat them,' she murmured in a heart-broken tone. 'I want—I want—something—something—to—to live with.'

"I was on the point of crying at her, 'Don't you hear them?' The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. 'The horror! The horror!'

" 'His last word—to live with,' she insisted. 'Don't you understand I loved him—I loved him—I loved him!'

"I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.

" 'The last word he pronounced was—your name.'

"I heard a light sigh and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. 'I knew it—I was sure!' . . . She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in her hands. It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which

was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether.

...⁸

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time. "We have lost the first of the ebb," said the Director suddenly. I raised my head. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

1898–991899, 1902

Endnotes

- Note 6: Long overcoat.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Centuries old.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:

Writing to William Blackwood (editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*, where the story first appeared) in May 1902, Conrad referred to "the last pages of *Heart of Darkness* where the interview of the man and the girl locks in—as it were—the whole 30,000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of a whole phase of life, and makes of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa" (Joseph Conrad, *Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*, ed. William Blackburn, 1958).

[Return to reference 8](#)

ON THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICA

Heart of Darkness drew on Joseph Conrad's personal experiences in Congo and on his encounters with Europeans working in the ivory and rubber trades. These trades, so essential to the accumulation of Belgian imperial wealth in Congo and European wealth in Africa more broadly, resulted in atrocities committed against African peoples. Conrad morally condemned the abuse of "native populations," but did not seem to question the superiority of European peoples to African ones. His representation of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* as a dark and backward place contains within it the prevailing attitude of his time, but the novella also channels those attitudes into a set of images that has shaped the depiction of Africa and Africans in English-language literature for over a century.

For Conrad, Africa was a theater in which various kinds of European dramas unfolded: the crisis of imperialism as a so-called civilizing mission; the moral and psychic destruction of Kurtz as an officer of empire; and the difficult decision Marlow makes to keep the truth of Kurtz's fate from his fiancée. Marlow shares these dark secrets with a group of Englishmen and Europeans aboard the *Nellie*, and this small group can be viewed as a version of Conrad's imagined audience of White readers. Such audiences were ready to criticize and even reject the imperial project, but they, like Conrad, were not particularly attuned to the lives, customs, languages, and cultures of African peoples.

This section gathers select responses to the representation of Africa in the West by major novelists who have contended with Conrad's legacy. The first features a 2003 newspaper interview with Chinua Achebe by Black British novelist Caryl Phillips (see Phillips's headnote and a story by him later in this volume). Achebe is a towering figure in African literature and the author of *Things Fall Apart*, a 1958 novel about the destruction of precolonial Igbo culture upon the arrival of British missionaries. Achebe published a

controversial essay on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* called "The Image of Africa" (1978) in which he argued that Conrad's inability to think outside the European construction of Africa constituted a damning failure of his literary talents. Phillips approaches Achebe as an admirer of his novels, but a skeptic of his strong condemnation of Conrad's artistry. That skepticism shapes the debate that unfolds between him and Achebe while also giving a full and fair airing to Achebe's views of the racism inherent in representations of Africa and Africans within *Heart of Darkness*.

The second selection, a transcription of a 2009 TED talk by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (see the headnote to her later in this volume), does not mention Conrad by name, but reflects on the negative impact of monolithic literary representations of a diverse continent. Adichie acknowledges the economic and political struggles within African nations, but she rejects the image of Africa as uniformly impoverished, perennially embattled, and populated by alien peoples. She attributes this distorted representation of Africa to the capacity of Western literature to overpower stories from less globally influential literary cultures. Adichie powerfully notes that the representation of Africa that readers have inherited from the canon of Western literature is not a representation to pass on to future generations.

CARYL PHILLIPS

*From Out of Africa*¹

Chinua Achebe² leans forward to make his point. He raises a gentle finger in the manner of a benevolent schoolmaster. "But you have to understand. Art is more than just good sentences; this is what makes this situation tragic. The man is a capable artist and as such I expect better from him. I mean, what is his point in that book? Art is not intended to put people down. If so, then art would ultimately discredit itself."

Achebe does not take his eyes from me, and I stare back at him. The face is familiar and marked with the heavy lines of ageing that one would expect to find on a 72-year-old man's face. But Achebe's lines are graceful whorls which suggest wisdom. He leans back now and looks beyond me and through the window at the snowy landscape.

We are sitting in his one-storey house in upstate New York, deep in the wooded campus of Bard College. For the past 13 years, Achebe has been a professor at this well-known liberal arts college, which has had writers such as Mary McCarthy and Norman Mailer³ on the faculty. His house is decorated with African art and artifacts, but the landscape and the climate could not be further removed from Nigeria and the world of Achebe's fiction and non-fiction. As though tiring of the wintry landscape, Achebe turns and returns to our conversation.

"The man would appear to be obsessed with 'that' word."

"Nigger."

Achebe nods.

"He has an admiration of the white skin. It is the whiteness that he likes, and he is obsessed with the physicality of the negro."

Again Achebe falls silent, but this time he lowers his eyes as though suddenly overcome with fatigue. I continue to look at him, the father of African literature in the English language and undoubtedly one of the most important writers of the second half of the 20th century. What I find difficult to fathom is just why Conrad's short novel, *Heart of Darkness*, should exercise such a hold on him?

Achebe has taught term-long university courses dedicated to this one slim volume first published in 1902. As long ago as February 1975, while a visiting professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Achebe delivered a public lecture entitled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." The lecture has since come to be recognised as one of the most important and influential treatises in post-colonial literary discourse. However, the problem is I disagree with Achebe's response to the novel, and have never viewed Conrad—as Achebe states in his lecture—as simply "a thoroughgoing racist." Yet, at the same time, I hold Achebe in the highest possible esteem, and therefore, a two-hour drive up the Hudson River Valley into deepest upstate New York would seem a small price to pay to resolve this conundrum.

Achebe's lecture quickly establishes his belief that Conrad deliberately sets Africa up as "the other world" so that he might examine Europe. According to Achebe, Africa is presented to the reader as "the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality."

Achebe sees Conrad mocking both the African landscape and the African people. The story begins on the "good" River Thames which, in the past, "has been one of the dark places of the earth." The story soon takes us to the "bad" River Congo, presently one of those "dark places." It is a body of water upon which the steamer toils "along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy."

According to Achebe, Conrad's long and famously hypnotic sentences are mere "trickery," designed to induce a hypnotic stupor in the reader. Achebe drafts in the support of "the eagle-eyed English critic FR Leavis,"⁴ who many years ago noted Conrad's

“adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery” whose cumulative effect is to suggest that poor Africa is inexplicable.

But it is when Achebe turns to Conrad’s treatment of African humanity that he is most disparaging of Conrad’s vision. He quotes from the moment in the novel when the Europeans on the steamer encounter real live Africans in the flesh:

“We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—and you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend.”

These people are “ugly,” but what is even more disturbing is that they are in some way also human. A half-page later, Conrad focuses on one particular African, who, according to Achebe, is rare, for he is not presented as “just limbs or rolling eyes.” The problem is that the African man is, most disturbingly, not “in his place.”

“And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was a fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs.”

Those critics who have defended *Heart of Darkness* against charges of racism have often pointed to both the methodology of narration and Conrad’s anti-colonial purpose. The narrator of the novel is Marlow, who is simply retelling a story that was told to him by a shadowy second figure. However, in his lecture Achebe makes it

clear he is not fooled by this narrative gamesmanship, or the claims of those who would argue that the complex polyphony of the storytelling is Conrad's way of trying to deliberately distance himself from the views of his characters.

"... If Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator, his care seems to me to be totally wasted because he neglects to hint, clearly and adequately, at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Conrad seems to me to approve of Marlow ..."

Achebe is, however, aware of Conrad's ambivalence towards the colonising mission, and he concedes that the novel is, in part, an attempt to examine what happens when Europeans come into contact with this particular form of economic and social exploitation. In the lecture he remembers that a student in Scotland once informed him that Africa is "merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr Kurtz," which is an argument that many teachers and critics, let alone students, have utilised to defend the novel. But to read the book in this way is to further stir Achebe's outrage.

"Africa as setting and backdrop, which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?"

Achebe has no problem with a novel that seeks to question both European ambivalence towards the colonising mission and her own "system" of civilisation. What he has a huge problem with is a novelist—in fact, an artist—who attempts to resolve these important questions by denying Africa and Africans their full and complex humanity.

* * *

However, despite Achebe's compelling "evidence," I am still finding it difficult to dismiss this man and his short novel. Are we to throw all racists out of the canon? Are we, as Achebe suggests, to ignore the period in which novels are written and demand that the artist rise above the prejudices of his times? As much as I respect the man sitting before me, something does not ring true. We both agree that Conrad was not the originator of this disturbing image of Africa and Africans. And we both appear to agree that Conrad had the perception to see that this encounter with Africa exposed the fissures and instabilities in so-called European civilisation. Further, we both agree that in order to expose European fragility, Conrad pandered to a certain stereotype of African barbarity that, at the time, was accepted as the norm. Finally, we both agree that this stereotype is still with us today. Achebe speaks quickly, as though a thought has suddenly struck him.

"You see, those who say that Conrad is on my side because he is against colonial rule do not understand that I know who is on my side. And where is the proof that he is on my side? A few statements about it not being a very nice thing to exploit people who have flat noses? This is his defence against imperial control? If so it is not enough. It is simply not enough. If you are going to be on my side what is required is a better argument. Ultimately you have to admit that Africans are people. You cannot diminish a people's humanity and defend them."

I feel as though I am walking around an impregnable fortress. However, I am losing interest in the problem of breaching the ramparts and becoming more concerned with the aesthetics of its construction.

"Which European or American writers do you feel have best represented the continent of Africa and African people?"

Achebe looks at me for a long while and then slowly begins to shake his head.

"This is difficult. Not many."

I suggest Graham Greene.⁵

"Yes, perhaps. Graham Greene would be one because he knew his limitations. He didn't want to explain Africans to the world. He made limited claims and wasn't attempting to be too profound. After all, we can't be too profound about somebody whose history and language and culture is beyond our own."

"But you're not suggesting that outsiders should not write about other cultures?"

"No, no. This identification with the other is what a great writer brings to the art of story-making. We should welcome the rendering of our stories by others, because a visitor can sometimes see what the owner of the house has ignored. But they must visit with respect and not be concerned with the colour of skin, or the shape of nose, or the condition of the technology in the house."

It is now my turn to stare out of the window at the six-foot snow drifts and the bare, rickety arms of the trees. The light is beginning to fade and soon I will have to leave. I avert my eyes and turn to face my host.

"Chinua, I think Conrad offends you because he was a disrespectful visitor."

"I am an African. What interests me is what I learn in Conrad about myself. To use me as a symbol may be bright or clever, but if it reduces my humanity by the smallest fraction I don't like it."

"Conrad does present Africans as having 'rudimentary' souls."

Achebe draws himself upright.

"Yes, you will notice that the European traders have 'tainted' souls, Marlow has a 'pure' soul, but I am to accept that mine is 'rudimentary'?" He shakes his head. "Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a very short-lived period of ambivalence about the certainty of this colonising mission, and *Heart of Darkness* falls into this period. But you cannot compromise my humanity in order that you explore your own ambiguity. I cannot accept that. My humanity is not to be debated, nor is it to be used simply to illustrate European problems."

The realisation hits me with force. I am not an African. Were I an African I suspect I would feel the same way as my host. But I was

raised in Europe, and although I have learned to reject the stereotypically reductive images of Africa and Africans, I am undeniably interested in the break-up of a European mind and the health of European civilisation. I feel momentarily ashamed that I might have become caught up with this theme and subsequently overlooked how offensive this novel might be to a man such as Chinua Achebe and to millions of other Africans. Achebe is right; to the African reader the price of Conrad's eloquent denunciation of colonisation is the recycling of racist notions of the "dark" continent and her people. Those of us who are not from Africa may be prepared to pay this price, but this price is far too high for Achebe. However lofty Conrad's mission, he has, in keeping with times past and present, compromised African humanity in order to examine the European psyche. Achebe's response is understandably personal.

"Conrad's presentation of me is my problem and I have a responsibility to deal with it, you understand?" I nod. "I don't come from a 'half-made' society as your 'friend' Naipaul⁶ would say. We're not 'half-made' people, we're a very old people. We've seen lots of problems in the past. We've dealt with these problems in Africa, and we're older than the problems. Drought, famine, disease, this is not the first time that we're dealing with these things in Africa."

He takes a deep breath. Beyond him, and through the window, the blanket of night begins to descend over the woods.

"You know," he continues, "I think that to some extent it is how you must feel about your 'friend'. You take it to heart because a man with such talent should not behave in this way. My people, we say one palm nut does not get lost in the fire, for you must know where it is. But if you have 20 you may lose sight of some and they will get burned, but you have others. Well, as you know, we have very few who have the talent and who are in the right place, and to lose even one is a tragedy. We cannot afford to lose such artists. It is sheer cussedness to wilfully turn and walk away from the truth, and for what? Really, for what? I expect a great artist, a man who has explored, a man who is interested in Africa, not to make life more

difficult for us. Why do this? Why make our lives more difficult? In this sense Conrad is a disappointment.”

2003

Endnotes

- Note 1: Also the title of the memoir, published in 1937, by Isak Dinesen (1885–1962) that chronicles her time living on a coffee plantation in British East Africa (modern-day Kenya).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic (1930–2013).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: American novelist and journalist (1923–2007). “Mary McCarthy”: American writer and critic (1912–1989).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: English literary critic (1895–1978); he taught at Cambridge and was influential in shaping the teaching of English literature at the university level.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: English writer and journalist (1904–1991).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: V. S. Naipaul, Trinidadian-born writer of South Asian descent (1932–2018).[Return to reference 6](#)

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

The Danger of a Single Story¹

I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story." I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader. And what I read were British and American children's books.

I was also an early writer. And when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading. All my characters were white and blue-eyed. They played in the snow. They ate apples. And they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow. We ate mangoes. And we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was. (*Laughter*) And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books, by their very nature, had to have foreigners in them, and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I

discovered African books. There weren't many of them available. And they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.

But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye² I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.

Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So the year I turned eight we got a new house boy. His name was Fide.³ The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday we went to his village to visit. And his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket, made of dyed raffia,⁴ that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them is how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.

Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was nineteen. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she

could listen to what she called my “tribal music,” and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. (*Laughter*) She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.

What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning, pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa. A single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her, in any way. No possibility of feelings more complex than pity. No possibility of a connection as human equals.

I must say that before I went to the U.S. I didn’t consciously identify as African. But in the U.S. whenever Africa came up people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity. And in many ways I think of myself now as African. Although I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country. The most recent example being my otherwise wonderful flight from Lagos⁵ two days ago, in which there was an announcement on the Virgin flight about the charity work in “India, Africa and other countries.”

So after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate’s response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide’s family.

This single story of Africa ultimately comes, I think, from Western literature. Now, here is a quote from the writing of a London merchant called John Locke,⁶ who sailed to west Africa in 1561, and kept a fascinating account of his voyage. After referring to the black Africans as “beasts who have no houses,” he writes, “They are also people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts.”

Now, I've laughed every time I've read this. And one must admire the imagination of John Locke. But what is important about his writing is that it represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West. A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet, Rudyard Kipling, are "half devil, half child."

And so I began to realize that my American roommate must have, throughout her life, seen and heard different versions of this single story, as had a professor, who once told me that my novel was not "authentically African." Now, I was quite willing to contend that there were a number of things wrong with the novel, that it had failed in a number of places. But I had not quite imagined that it had failed at achieving something called African authenticity. In fact I did not know what African authenticity was. The professor told me that my characters were too much like him, an educated and middle-class man. My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they were not authentically African.

But I must quickly add that I too am just as guilty in the question of the single story. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. The political climate in the U.S. at the time, was tense. And there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleecing the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara,² watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then I was overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself. So that is how to create a single story,

show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo⁸ word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is “nkali.” It’s a noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another.” Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali. How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti⁹ writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story, and to start with, “secondly.” Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.

I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him that I had just read a novel called *American Psycho*—¹ and that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers. Now, obviously I said this in a fit of mild irritation.

I would never have occurred to me to think that just because I had read a novel in which a character was a serial killer that he was somehow representative of all Americans. And now, this is not because I am a better person than that student, but, because of America’s cultural and economic power, I had many stories of America. I had read Tyler and Updike and Steinbeck and Gaitskill.² I did not have a single story of America.

When I learned, some years ago, that writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful, I began to think about how I could invent horrible things my parents had done

to me. (*Laughter*) But the truth is that I had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.

But I also had grandfathers who died in refugee camps. My cousin Polle died because he could not get adequate healthcare. One of my closest friends, Okoloma, died in a plane crash because our firetrucks did not have water. I grew up under repressive military governments that devalued education, so that sometimes my parents were not paid their salaries. And so, as a child, I saw jam disappear from the breakfast table, then margarine disappeared, then bread became too expensive, then milk became rationed. And most of all, a kind of normalized political fear invaded our lives.

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes. There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo. And depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe. And it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.

I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

So what if before my Mexican trip I had followed the immigration debate from both sides, the U.S. and the Mexican? What if my mother had told us that Fide's family was poor and hardworking? What if we had an African television network that broadcast diverse African stories all over the world? What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories."

What if my roommate knew about my Nigerian publisher, Mukta Bakaray, a remarkable man who left his job in a bank to follow his dream and start a publishing house? Now, the conventional wisdom was that Nigerians don't read literature. He disagreed. He felt that people who could read, would read, if you made literature affordable and available to them.

Shortly after he published my first novel I went to a TV station in Lagos to do an interview. And a woman who worked there as a messenger came up to me and said, "I really liked your novel. I didn't like the ending. Now you must write a sequel, and this is what will happen . . ." (*Laughter*) And she went on to tell me what to write in the sequel. Now I was not only charmed, I was very moved. Here was a woman, part of the ordinary masses of Nigerians, who were not supposed to be readers. She had not only read the book, but she had taken ownership of it and felt justified in telling me what to write in the sequel.

Now, what if my roommate knew about my friend Fumi Onda, a fearless woman who hosts a TV show in Lagos, and is determined to tell the stories that we prefer to forget? What if my roommate knew about the heart procedure that was performed in the Lagos hospital last week? What if my roommate knew about contemporary Nigerian music? Talented people singing in English and Pidgin, and Igbo and Yoruba and Ijo, mixing influences from Jay-Z to Fela to Bob Marley to their grandfathers. What if my roommate knew about the female lawyer who recently went to court in Nigeria to challenge a ridiculous law that required women to get their husband's consent before renewing their passports? What if my roommate knew about Nollywood, full of innovative people making films despite great technical odds? Films so popular that they really are the best example of Nigerians consuming what they produce. What if my roommate knew about my wonderfully ambitious hair braider, who has just started her own business selling hair extensions? Or about the millions of other Nigerians who start businesses and sometimes fail, but continue to nurse ambition?

Every time I am home I am confronted with the usual sources of irritation for most Nigerians: our failed infrastructure, our failed government. But also by the incredible resilience of people who thrive despite the government, rather than because of it. I teach writing workshops in Lagos every summer. And it is amazing to me how many people apply, how many people are eager to write, to tell stories.

My Nigerian publisher and I have just started a non-profit called Farafina Trust. And we have big dreams of building libraries and refurbishing libraries that already exist, and providing books for state schools that don't have anything in their libraries, and also of organizing lots and lots of workshops, in reading and writing, for all the people who are eager to tell our many stories. Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.

The American writer Alice Walker³ wrote this about her southern relatives who had moved to the north. She introduced them to a book about the southern life that they had left behind. "They sat around, reading the book themselves, listening to me read the book, and a kind of paradise was regained." I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise. Thank you.

2009

Endnotes

- Note 1: This selection is a TED talk that Adichie gave in 2009 about the capacity of a dominant story to perpetuate misconceptions. This talk can be found online by doing a web search for Adichie, The Danger of a Single Story.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Guinean author (1928–1980) of Francophone novels including *L'Enfant Noir* (1953; trans. *The African Child*) and *Le Regard du Roi* (1954; trans. *The Radiance of the King*).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pronounced Fidé, as if there is an accent over the é.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A fiber made from a type of palm tree.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The largest city in Nigeria; one of the most populous cities in Africa.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Not to be confused with the political philosopher John Locke (1632–1704).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Capital city of Jalisco, Mexico.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Language of the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The quote is from Bhargouti's essay collection *I Saw Ramallah* (2003), in which the poet (1944–2021) returns to Palestine after thirty years of exile.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A novel by Bret Easton Ellis, published in 1991.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mary Gaitskill (b. 1954), American short-story writer and novelist. Anne Tyler (b. 1941), American novelist. John Updike (1932–2009), American novelist, poet, and critic. John Steinbeck (1902–1968), American novelist.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: African American novelist (b. 1944) and poet best known for *The Color Purple* (1982).[Return to reference 3](#)

A. E. HOUSMAN

1859–1936

Alfred Edward Housman was born in Fockbury, Worcestershire (close to the Shropshire border), and attended school at the nearby town of Bromsgrove. He studied classics and philosophy at Oxford and in 1881 shocked his friends and teachers by failing his final examinations (he was at the time in a state of psychological turmoil resulting from his suppressed homosexual love for a fellow student). He obtained a civil service job and pursued his classical studies alone, gradually building up a reputation as a great textual critic of Latin literature. In 1892 he was appointed to the chair of Latin at University College, London, and from 1911 until his death he was professor of Latin at Cambridge.

Housman's classical studies consisted of meticulous, impersonal textual investigations; both his scholarship and his life were reserved and solitary. Yet his feeling for literature ran strong and deep, and in his lecture "The Name and Nature of Poetry" (1933) he says that poetry should be "more physical than intellectual," having a skin-bristling, spine-shivering effect on the reader. His own poetry was limited both in quantity and in range, but—stark, lucid, elegant—it exemplifies the "superior terseness" he prized in verse. Two "slim volumes"—*A Shropshire Lad* (1896) and *Last Poems* (1922)—were all that appeared during his lifetime, and after his death his brother Laurence brought out another small book, *More Poems* (1936).

As a poet Housman aimed not to expand or develop the resources of English poetry but by limitation and concentration to achieve an utterance both compact and moving. He was influenced by Greek and Latin lyric poetry, by the traditional ballad, and by the lyrics of the early nineteenth-century German poet Heinrich Heine. His favorite theme is that of the doomed youth acting out the tragedy of his brief life; the context is agricultural activity in England, with the land bearing visual reminders of humanity's long history. Nature is beautiful but indifferent and is to be enjoyed while we are still able to savor it. Love, friendship, and conviviality cannot last and may well result in betrayal or death, but are likewise to be relished while there is time. Wryly ironic in tone, stoic in temperament, Housman sounds a note of resigned wisdom with quiet poignancy. He avoids self-pity by projecting emotion through an imagined character, notably the "Shropshire lad," so that even the first-person poems seem to be distanced in some degree. At the same time the poems are distinguished from the "gather ye rosebuds" (or *carpe diem*) tradition by the undertones of fatalism and even doom.

Loveliest of Trees

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

5 Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

10 And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

1896

When I Was One-and-Twenty

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard a wise man say,
"Give crowns and pounds and guineas
But not your heart away;
Give pearls away and rubies
5 But keep your fancy free."
But I was one-and-twenty,
No use to talk to me.

When I was one-and-twenty
I heard him say again,
10 "The heart out of the bosom
Was never given in vain;
'Tis paid with sighs a plenty
And sold for endless rue."°
And I am two-and-twenty,
15 And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

1896

Notes

- °: *repentance* [Return to reference °](#)

To an Athlete Dying Young

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

5 Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.

10 Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel¹ grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

15 Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,^o
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

20 Now you will not swell the rout^o
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

25 And round that early laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead

And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

1896

Endnotes

- Note 1: In ancient Greece and Rome victorious athletes were crowned with laurel wreaths. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *broken* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *crowd* [Return to reference °](#)

Terence,¹ This Is Stupid Stuff

“Terence, this is stupid stuff:
You eat your victuals fast enough;
There can’t be much amiss, ’tis clear,
To see the rate you drink your beer.
5 But oh, good Lord, the verse you make,
It gives a chap the belly-ache.
The cow, the old cow, she is dead;
It sleeps well, the hornèd head:
We poor lads, ’tis our turn now
10 To hear such tunes as killed the cow.
Pretty friendship ’tis to rhyme
Your friends to death before their time
Moping melancholy mad:
Come, pipe a tune to dance to, lad.”

15 Why, if ’tis dancing you would be,
There’s brisker pipes than poetry.
Say, for what were hop-yards meant,
Or why was Burton built on Trent?²
Oh many, a peer³ of England brews
Livelier liquor than the Muse,
20 And malt does more than Milton can
To justify God’s ways to man.⁴
Ale, man, ale’s the stuff to drink
For fellows whom it hurts to think:
Look into the pewter pot
25 To see the world as the world’s not.
And faith, ’tis pleasant till ’tis past:
The mischief is that ’twill not last.
Oh I have been to Ludlow⁵ Fair

30 And left my necktie God knows where,
And carried half-way home, or near,
Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer:
Then the world seemed none so bad,
And I myself a sterling lad;
35 And down in lovely muck I've lain,
Happy till I woke again.
Then I saw the morning sky:
Heigho, the tale was all a lie;
The world, it was the old world yet,
40 I was I, my things were wet,
And nothing now remained to do
But begin the game anew.

Therefore, since the world has still
Much good, but much less good than ill,
45 And while the sun and moon endure
Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure,
I'd face it as a wise man would,
And train for ill and not for good.
'Tis true the stuff I bring for sale
Is not so brisk a brew as ale:
50 Out of a stem that scored^o the hand
I wrung it in a weary land.
But take it: if the smack is sour,
The better for the embittered hour;
It should do good to heart and head
55 When your soul is in my soul's stead;
And I will friend you, if I may,
In the dark and cloudy day.

There was a king reigned in the East:
There, when kings will sit to feast,
60 They get their fill before they think
With poisoned meat and poisoned drink.
He gathered all that springs to birth

65 From the many-venomed earth;
 First a little, thence to more,
 He sampled all her killing store;
 And easy, smiling, seasoned sound,
 Sate the king when healths went round.
 They put arsenic in his meat
 And stared aghast to watch him eat;
 70 They poured strychnine in his cup
 And shook to see him drink it up:
 They shook, they stared as white's their shirt:
 Them it was their poison hurt.
 —I tell the tale that I heard told.
 75 Mithridates, he died old.⁶

1896

Endnotes

- Note 1: *The Poems of Terence Hearsay* was Housman's intended title for *The Shropshire Lad*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Burton-on-Trent is the most famous of all English brewing towns.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A reference to the "beer barons," brewery magnates raised to the peerage (that is, made nobles).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Milton's promise in *Paradise Lost* (1.17–26) to "justify the ways of God to men."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A market town in Shropshire.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The story of Mithridates, king of Pontus, who made himself immune to poison by taking small doses daily, is told in Pliny's *Natural History*.[Return to reference 6](#)

Notes

- °: *cut*[Return to reference °](#)

Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries^{[1](#)}

These, in the day when heaven was falling,
The hour when earth's foundations fled,
Followed their mercenary calling
And took their wages and are dead.

5 Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;
What God abandoned, these defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay.

1917, 1922

Endnotes

- Note 1: To honor the heroism of the professional soldiers of the British Regular Army in the First Battle of Ypres (1914), Housman published this poem in *The Times* on the third anniversary of the turning point of that battle, Oct. 31, 1917.[Return to reference 1](#)

Voices from World War I

The original spark that set off what proved to be the bloodiest and most widespread war that had yet been fought was the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in the Balkan state of Serbia on June 28, 1914. Austria, supported by Germany, used the murder as a pretext for declaring war on Serbia, which in turn was supported by its fellow-Slav country Russia. Because Russia was bound by a treaty obligation to both France and Britain, Russia and France were soon at war with Germany and Austria. The most effective way for Germany to attack France was to go through Belgium, though all the powers had guaranteed Belgian neutrality. The attack on Belgium impelled Britain to declare war on Germany on August 4, but rival imperialisms, an international armaments race, France's desire to regain Alsace-Lorraine (which it had lost to Germany in 1870), and German and Austrian ambitions in the Balkans were some of the many other factors that brought about the four-year conflict, a struggle that shook the world. Turkey sided with Germany and Austria in October 1914, and Bulgaria allied itself with them the following year. Britain and France were joined by Japan late in August 1914, by Italy (although Italy had in 1882 joined the "Triple Alliance" with Germany and Austria directed against France and Russia) in May 1915, and by the United States in April 1917.



(*Left*) British soldiers cross no-man's-land. The terrain has been laid waste by battle. (*Right*) Allied soldiers follow an officer out of a trench, April 7, 1918. German shells burst around them during the Arras and Cambrai offensive on the Western Front in France. The phrase "going over the top" described infantry rising up out of their trenches to attack the enemy. Soldiers were at grave risk as they came into the open and crossed into no-man's-land.



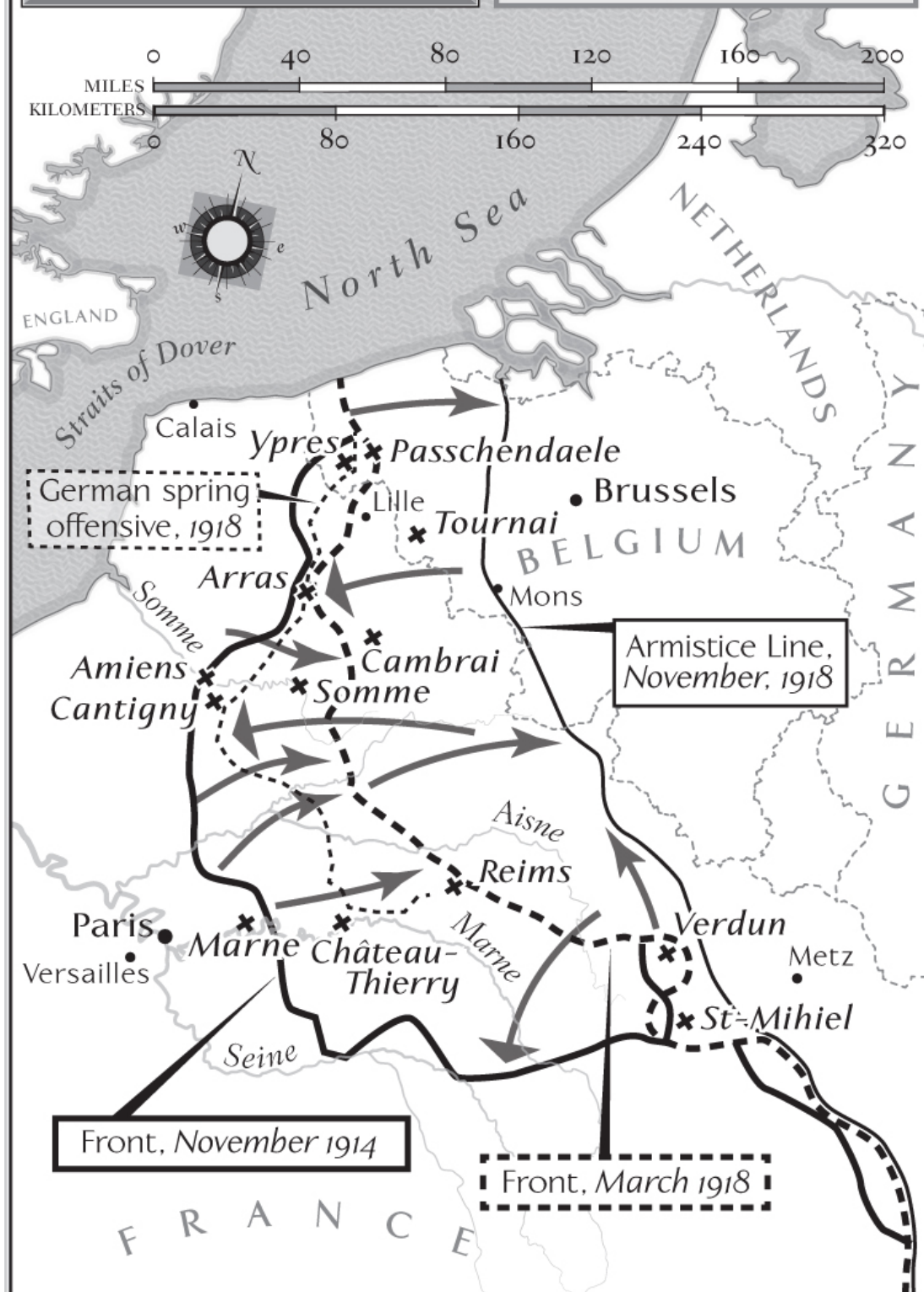
Before the collapse of Germany followed by the armistice of November 11, 1918, some 8,700,000 lives had been lost (including 780,000 British—virtually a whole generation of young men) and the prolonged horrors of trench warfare had seared themselves into the minds of the survivors. For three years the battle line, “the Western Front,” was stabilized between northwest France and Switzerland, with both sides dug in and making repeated, costly, and generally useless attempts to advance. The German use of poison gas at the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915, the massive German attack at Verdun in 1916, and the British introduction of tanks on the Somme in the same year failed to produce the breakthrough each side desired. Desolate, war-scarred landscapes with blasted trees and mud everywhere, trenches half-filled with water and infested with rats, miles of protective barbed wire requiring individual “volunteers” to crawl through machine-gun fire and cut it so an advance could begin, long-continued massive bombardments by heavy artillery, and a sense of stalemate that suggested to the soldiers involved that this living hell could go on forever—all this was long kept from the knowledge of the civilians at home, who continued to use the old patriotic slogans and write in old-fashioned romantic terms about glorious cavalry charges and the noble pursuit of heroic ideals. But

those poets who were involved on the front, however romantically they may have felt about the cause when they joined up, soon realized the full horror of war, and this realization affected both their imaginations and their poetic techniques. They had to find a way of expressing the terrible truths they had experienced, and even when they did not express them directly, the underlying knowledge affected the way they wrote.

WORLD WAR I

Western Front, 1914–1918

GERMAN ADVANCE ←
ALLIED ADVANCE →
✕ Major battle



The Western Front was the primary site of military conflict during World War I, although the war also extended to Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. Following the outbreak of war in August 1914, Germany opened the front by invading Luxembourg and Belgium, then gaining control of important industrial regions in France. The two sides bogged down for years, erecting fortified trenches along a line that changed little for most of the war. In major offenses along the front, massive infantry advances and artillery bombardments resulted in unprecedented casualties.

The poetry that was in vogue when war broke out, and that some poets continued to write for some years afterward, was named "Georgian" in honor of King George V, who had succeeded Edward VII in 1910. The term was first used of poets when Edward Marsh brought out in 1912 the first of a series of five anthologies called *Georgian Poetry*. The work therein represented an attempt to wall in the garden of English poetry against the disruptive forces of modern civilization. Cultured meditations of the English countryside ("I love the mossy quietness / That grows upon the great stone flags") alternated with self-conscious exercises in the exotic ("When I was but thirteen or so / I went into a golden land, / Chimporazo, Cotopaxi / Took me by the hand"). Sometimes the magical note was authentic, as in many of Walter de la Mare's poems, and sometimes the meditative strain was original and impressive, as in Edward Thomas's poetry. But as World War I went on, with more and more poets killed and the survivors increasingly disillusioned, the whole world on which the Georgian imagination rested came to appear unreal. A patriotic poem such as Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" became a ridiculous anachronism in the face of the realities of trench warfare, and the even more blatantly patriotic note sounded by other Georgian poems (as in John Freeman's "Happy Is England Now," which claimed that "there's not a nobleness of heart, hand, brain / But shines the purer; happiest is England now / In those that fight") seemed obscene. The savage ironies of Siegfried Sassoon's war poems and the combination of pity and irony in Wilfred Owen's work

portrayed a world undreamed of in the golden years from 1910 to 1914.

WOMEN ^{OF} BRITAIN

SAY—

“GO!”



“Women of Britain Say—‘Go!’ ” The women in this British recruiting poster from 1915 are represented as having sent off their men to fight for the domestic harmony of home and the idyllic beauty of a countryside glimpsed through the open window.

World War I left throughout Europe a sense that the bases of civilization had been destroyed, that all traditional values had been wiped out. We see this sense reflected in the years immediately after the war in different ways in, for example, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Aldous Huxley’s early fiction. But the poets who wrote during the war most directly reflected the impact of the war experience.

RUPERT BROOKE

Rupert Brooke (1887–1915) was educated at Rugby School and at King's College, Cambridge. When World War I began he was commissioned as an officer into the Royal Naval Division and took part in its brief and abortive expedition to Antwerp. On leave in December 1914 he wrote the "war sonnets" that were to make him famous; five months later he died of dysentery and blood poisoning on a troopship destined for Gallipoli.

Brooke was the most popular of the Georgians, pastoral poets who infused nature with nationalist feeling. His early death symbolized the death of a whole generation of patriotic Englishmen. Shortly before then the dean of St. Paul's read "The Soldier" in a sermon from the Cathedral pulpit, and in a 1915 valediction in the London *Times*, Winston Churchill sounded a note that swelled over the following months and years: "Joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, he was all that one would wish England's noblest sons to be in days when no sacrifice but the most precious is acceptable, and the most precious is that which is most freely proffered." Brooke's *1914 and Other Poems* was published in June 1915, and during the next decade this and his *Collected Poems* sold three hundred thousand copies.

The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

5 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

10 And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the Eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England
given,
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

19141915

ROBERT SERVICE

Born in Preston, England, to Scottish parents, Robert Service (1874–1958) lived a life that crossed national borders. He moved to Scotland at the age of five and was educated in Glasgow before moving to Canada in his early twenties. Working on farms and then as a banker in western Canada, he won popular acclaim with his first volume of verse, *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907), including his narrative poems about the Yukon Gold Rush of 1898, “The Shooting of Dan McGrew” and “The Ballad of Sam McGee.” These early ballads established his reputation as the “Canadian Kipling” or “Bard of the Yukon,” though Service never gave up his British citizenship. Before the First World War, he married a Frenchwoman, Germaine Bourgoïn. During the war, he was a war reporter for Canadian newspapers, writing gritty accounts of the suffering on the front. He was also able to observe wounded combatants at close hand while serving as an ambulance driver and stretcher bearer for the American Red Cross. After the war he lived mostly in France.

Service’s wartime collection of poetry, *Rhymes of a Red Cross Man* (1916), was dedicated to his brother, killed while fighting in 1916 in the Canadian infantry. These poems show a deep empathy for the lot of the common soldier. The oral, folk style of his poetic ballads is unlike the Keats-inspired (if soured) Romanticism of wartime lyrics by a contemporary like Wilfred Owen. Cast in boisterous rhythms and rhymes, many of them are dramatic monologues voiced in the language of the working-class soldier. In “Only a Boche,” Service represents in engrossing detail a French soldier’s imagining his way across wartime division into a German soldier’s experience. The poem is one of the war’s most vivid dramatizations of a soldier’s tentative breakthrough into the shared humanity of the enemy other.

Only a Boche¹

We brought him in from between the lines: we'd
better have let him lie;
For what's the use of risking one's skin for a *tyke*²
that's going to die?
What's the use of tearing him loose under a gruelling
fire,
When he's shot in the head, and worse than dead,
and all messed up on the wire?³

5 However, I say, we brought him in. *Diable!*⁴ The mud
 was bad;
The trench was crooked and greasy and high, and
 oh, what a time we had!
And often we slipped, and often we tripped, but
 never he made a moan;
And how we were wet with blood and with sweat!
 but we carried him in like our own.

Now there he lies in the dug-out dim, awaiting the
 ambulance,
10 And the doctor shrugs his shoulders at him, and
 remarks, "he hasn't a chance."
And we squat and smoke at our game of bridge on
 the glistening, straw-packed floor,
And above our oaths we can hear his breath deep-
 drawn in a kind of snore.

For the dressing station is long and low, and the
 candles gutter dim,
And the mean light falls on the cold clay walls and
 our faces bristly and grim;

15 And we flap our cards on the lousy straw, and we
 laugh and jibe as we play,
 And you'd never know that the cursed foe was less
 than a mile away.
 As we con⁵ our cards in the rancid gloom, oppressed
 by that snoring breath,
 You'd never dream that our broad roof-beam was
 swept by the broom of death.

 Heigh-ho! My turn for the dummy hand;⁶ I rise and I
 stretch a bit;
20 The fetid air is making me yawn, and my cigarette's
 unlit,
 So I go to the nearest candle flame, and the man we
 brought is there,
 And his face is white in the shabby light, and I stand
 at his feet and stare.
 Stand for awhile, and quietly stare, for strange
 though it seems to be,
 The dying Boche on the stretcher there has a queer
 resemblance to me.

25 It gives one a kind of a turn, you know, to come on
 a thing like that.
 It's just as if I were lying there, with a turban of
 blood for a hat,
 Lying there in a coat grey-green instead of a coat
 grey-blue,⁷
 With one of my eyes all shot away, and my brain half
 tumbling through;
 Lying there with a chest that heaves like a bellows
 up and down,
30 And a cheek as white as snow on a grave, and lips
 that are coffee brown.

And confound him, too! He wears like me on his
finger a wedding ring,
And around his neck, as around my own, by a greasy
bit of string,
A locket hangs with a woman's face, and I turn it
about to see:
Just as I thought . . . on the other side the faces of
children three;
35 Clustered together cherub-like three little laughing
girls,
With the usual tiny rosebud mouths and the usual
silken curls.
"Zut!"⁸ I say. "He has beaten me; for me, I have only
two,"
And I push the locket beneath his shirt, feeling a
little blue.

Oh, it isn't cheerful to see a man, the marvellous
work of God,
40 Crushed in the mutilation mill, crushed to a smeary
clod;
Oh, it isn't cheerful to hear him moan; but it isn't
that I mind,
It isn't the anguish that goes with him, it's the
anguish he leaves behind.
For his going opens a tragic door that gives on a
world of pain,
And the death he dies, those who live and love, will
die again and again.

45 So here I am at my cards once more, but it's kind of
spoiling my play,
Thinking of those three brats of his so many a mile
away.
War is war, and he's only a Boche, and we all of us
take our chance;

50 But all the same I'll be mighty glad when I'm hearing
the ambulance.
One foe the less, but all the same I'm heartily glad
I'm not
The man who gave him his broken head, the sniper
who fired the shot.

No trumps you make it, I think you said? You'll
pardon me if I err;
For a moment I thought of other things . . . *Mon*
*Dieu! Quelle vache de guerre.*⁹

1916

Endnotes

- Note 1: A German, especially a soldier (derogatory).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Uncouth fellow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Barbed wire protecting entrenchments from infantry attack.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Devil! (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Study.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In bridge, a hand of cards displayed for all to see; its holder does not play that round.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: German soldiers wore gray-green uniforms; French soldiers wore gray-blue.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Damn!" (French).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: My God! What a cow the war is (French); that is, this war sucks.[Return to reference 9](#)

EDWARD THOMAS

Edward Thomas (1878–1917) was born of Welsh parents in London and was educated there and at Lincoln College, Oxford, which he left with a wife, a baby, and high literary ambitions. Despite his chronic depression, which became more marked over the difficult years that followed, he reviewed up to fifteen books a week, published thirty books between 1897 and 1917, and during those twenty years edited sixteen anthologies and editions. His great gifts as a literary critic appeared to best advantage in his reviewing of poetry, and he was the first to salute new stars in the literary firmament such as Robert Frost and Ezra Pound.

Although he had long been conscientiously reviewing poetry, which he regarded as the highest form of literature, he apparently made no serious attempt to write poems until the autumn of 1914. Then, as he faced the stress of deciding whether to enlist, poems began to pour out of him: five between December 3 and 7, and ten more before the end of the month. His friend Frost offered to find him work in the United States, but feelings of patriotism, and the attraction of a salary that would support his growing family, led him to enlist in July 1915. His awareness of the natural world, its richness and beauty, was then intensified by a sense of impending loss and the certainty of death—his own and others'. In the long sentences that make up his verse, he ruminates with great delicacy on beauty and nature, but he also demonstrates an unsentimental toughness. In "Rain," for example, he compares the dead to "Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff." As violence to the natural order of things, war indirectly but persistently shadows Thomas's poems. In January 1917 he was sent to the Western Front and, on Easter Monday, was killed by a shell blast.

Adlestrop^{[1](#)}

Yes, I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

5 The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

10 And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

15 And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Jan. 19151917

Endnotes

- Note 1: A village in Gloucestershire.[Return to reference 1](#)

The Owl

Downhill I came, hungry, and yet not starved;
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.

5 Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry

10 Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went.

15 And salted^o was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

19151917

Notes

- ^o: *flavored*[Return to reference ^o](#)

Rain¹

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
5 Since I was born into this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
10 Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
15 Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be towards what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Jan. 19161917

Endnotes

- Note 1:
See also Thomas's account of an English walking tour, *The Ickniel Way* (1913): "In the heavy, black rain falling straight from invisible, dark sky to invisible, dark earth the heat of summer is annihilated, the splendour is dead, the summer is gone. The midnight rain buries it away where it has buried all sound but its own. I am alone in the dark still night, and my ear listens to the rain piping in the gutters and roaring softly in the

trees of the world. Even so will the rain fall darkly upon the grass over the grave when my ears can hear it no more. . . . Black and monotonously sounding is the midnight and solitude of the rain. In a little while or in an age—for it is all one—I shall know the full truth of the words I used to love, I knew not why, in my days of nature, in the days before the rain: 'Blessed are the dead that the rain rains on.' "

[Return to reference 1](#)

The Cherry Trees

The cherry trees bend over and are shedding
On the old road where all that passed are dead,
Their petals, strewing the grass as for a wedding
This early May morn when there is none to wed.

May 19161917

As the Team's Head Brass¹

As the team's head brass flashed out on the turn
The lovers disappeared into the wood.
I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
That strewed an angle of the fallow,² and
Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
5 Of charlock.³ Every time the horses turned
Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
Upon the handles to say or ask a word,
About the weather, next about the war.
Scraping the share⁴ he faced towards the wood,
10 And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.

The blizzard felled the elm whose crest
I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,
The ploughman said. "When will they take it away?"
"When the war's over." So the talk began—
15 One minute and an interval of ten,
A minute more and the same interval.
"Have you been out?" "No." "And don't want to,
perhaps?"
"If I could only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
20 A leg. If I should lose my head, why, so,
I should want nothing more. . . . Have many gone
From here?" "Yes." "Many lost?" "Yes, a good few.
Only two teams work on the farm this year.
One of my mates is dead. The second day
25 In France they killed him. It was back in March,
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree."

30 "And I should not have sat here. Everything
Would have been different. For it would have been
Another world." "Ay, and a better, though
If we could see all all might seem good." Then
The lovers came out of the wood again:
The horses started and for the last time
35 I watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.

May 19161917

Endnotes

- Note 1: Also known as horse brass: a decorative brass medallion or emblem attached to a horse's harness.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ground plowed and harrowed but left uncropped for a year or more.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *wild mustard*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *plowshare*[Return to reference °](#)

MARY BORDEN

Born in Chicago and educated at Vassar College, Mary Borden (1886–1968) lived most of her life in England and Europe. While traveling in India she met her first husband, Douglas Turner, a Scottish missionary, and they settled in London in 1913. There she was part of a literary circle that included Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. She was also a stone-throwing feminist activist, or “suffragette,” for which she was briefly jailed. At the start of World War I, her husband enlisted and Borden volunteered as a nurse. During the war their marriage fell apart, and Borden met her second husband, Louis Spears, an English officer who later became a member of Parliament and diplomat. Having begun the war as a nurse for the French Red Cross, Borden eventually ran French field hospitals near the front line, for which she won British and French military medals for bravery. Having lived in England between the wars and published a spate of novels, she again ran French military hospitals during World War II. But the memories of her close encounters with the gruesome carnage of World War I made the most enduring impression on her literary work.

These memories feature in the sketches, short stories, and poems that make up *The Forbidden Zone* (1929)—an earlier version of which she had tried to publish during the war but could not because of censorship. In prose sketches such as “Belgium,” she observes in acute detail the war’s fragmentation of lives and its erasing of meaningful social distinctions. “Belgium” begins with the all-engulfing mud that is also the subject of her most innovative poem, “Song of the Mud,” originally the middle of a poetic trilogy, “The Somme,” published during the war. Few poems capture as vividly the ecological disaster of World War I: the military destruction turned vast tracts of Earth’s surface into mud, and many soldiers were swallowed whole by it. In the free-verse repetitions of Borden’s poem, the mud becomes a devouring monster that is covering,

spreading, coating, caking, soaking, mixing, crawling, filling, sucking.
Her ever-expanding and contracting lines seem to embody the
mudlike force of the war's human and environmental catastrophe.

Belgium¹

Mud: and a thin rain coming down to make more mud.

Mud: with scraps of iron lying in it and the straggling fragment of a nation, lolling, hanging about in the mud on the edge of disaster.

It is quiet here. The rain and the mud muffle the voice of the war that is growling beyond the horizon. But if you listen you can hear cataracts of iron pouring down channels in the sodden land, and you feel the earth trembling.

Back there is France, just behind the windmill. To the north, the coast; a coast without a port, futile. On our right? That's the road to Ypres.² The less said about that road the better: no one goes down it for choice—it's British now. Ahead of us, then? No, you can't get out that way. No, there's no frontier, just a bleeding edge, trenches. That's where the enemy took his last bite, fastened his iron teeth, and stuffed to bursting, stopped devouring Belgium, left this strip, these useless fields, these crumpled dwellings.

Cities? None. Towns? No whole ones. Yes, there are half a dozen villages. But there is plenty of mud, and a thin silent rain falling to make more mud—mud with things lying in it, wheels, broken motors, parts of houses, graves.

This is what is left of Belgium. Come, I'll show you. Here are trees drooping along a canal, ploughed fields, roads leading into sand-dunes, roofless houses. There's a farm, an old woman with a crooked back feeding chickens, a convoy of motor lorries³ round a barn; they squat like elephants. And here is a village crouching in the mud: the cobblestone street is slippery and smeared with refuse, and there is a yellow cat sitting in a window. This is the headquarters of the Belgian Army. You see those men, lolling in the doorways—uncouth, dishevelled, dirty? They are soldiers. You can read on their heavy jowls, in their stupefied, patient, hopeless eyes, how boring it is to be a hero.

The King⁴ is here. His office is in the schoolroom down the street, a little way past the church, just beyond the dung heap. If we wait we may see him. Let's stand with these people in the rain and wait.

A band is going to play to the army. Yes, I told you, this is the army—these stolid men standing aimlessly in the drizzle, and these who come stumbling along the slippery ditches, and those leaning in degraded doorways. They fought their way out of Liège and Namur,⁵ followed the King here; they are what is left of plucky little Belgium's heroic army.

And the song of the nation that comes from the horns in the front of the wine shop, the song that sounds like the bleating of sheep, can it help them? Can it deceive them? Can it whisk from their faces the stale despair, and unutterable boredom, and brighten their disappointed eyes? They are so few, and they have nothing to do but stand in the rain waiting. When the band stops they will disappear into the *estaminet*⁶ to warm their stomachs with wine and cuddle the round-cheeked girls. What else can they do? The French are on one side of them, the British on the other, and the enemy in front. They cannot go back; to go back is to retreat, and they have been retreating ever since they can remember. They can retreat no farther. This village is where they stop. At one end of it is a pigsty, at the other end is a grave-yard, and all about are flats of mud. Can the noise, the rhythmical beating of the drum, the piping, the hoarse shrieking, help these men, make them believe, make them glad to be heroes? They have nowhere to go now and nothing to do. There is nothing but mud all about, and a soft fine rain coming down to make more mud—mud with a broken fragment of a nation lolling in it, hanging about waiting in it behind the shelter of a disaster that has been accomplished.

Come away, for God's sake—come away. Let's go back to Dunkerque.⁷ The King? Didn't you see him? He came out of the schoolhouse some time ago and drove away toward the sand-dunes—a big fair man in uniform. You didn't notice? Never mind. Come away.

1914–181929

Endnotes

- Note 1: Germany invaded and occupied Belgium to gain a positional advantage against France near the beginning of World War I. The occupation, which included widespread violence against civilians, is often referred to as “the Rape of Belgium.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Key Belgian city during the war, between France and Germany’s planned course of attack.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Trucks.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Albert I reigned as king of the Belgians from 1909 to 1934. He took personal command of the Belgian army during the war.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Belgian cities fortified against German invasion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Café (French).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dunkirk, a city on the northern coast of France.[Return to reference 7](#)

The Song of the Mud

This is the song of the mud,
The pale yellow glistening mud that covers the
naked hills like satin,
The grey gleaming silvery mud that is spread like
enamel over the valleys,
The frothing, squirting, spurting liquid mud that
gurgles along the road-beds,
5 The thick elastic mud that is kneaded and pounded
and squeezed under the hoofs of horses,
The invincible, inexhaustible mud of the War Zone.

This is the song of the mud, the uniform of the
poilu.¹
His coat is of mud, his poor great flapping coat that
is too big for him and too heavy,
His coat that once was blue, and now is grey and
stiff with the mud that cakes it.
10 This is the mud that clothes him—
His trousers and boots are of mud—
And his skin is of mud—
And there is mud in his beard.
His head is crowned with a helmet of mud,
And he wears it—oh, he wears it well!
15 He wears it as a King wears the ermine² that bores
him—
He has set a new style in clothing,
He has introduced the *chic*³ of mud.

This is the song of the mud that wriggles its way into
battle,

20 The impertinent, the intrusive, the ubiquitous, the
unwelcome,
The slimy, inveterate nuisance,
That fills the trenches,
That mixes in with the food of the soldiers,
That spoils the working of motors and crawls into
their secret parts,
That spreads itself over the guns,
25 That sucks the guns down and holds them fast in its
slimy, voluminous lips,
That has no respect for destruction and muzzles the
bursting of shells,
And slowly, softly, easily,
Soaks up the fire, the noise, soaks up the energy
and the courage,
Soaks up the power of armies,
30 Soaks up the battle—
Just soaks it up and thus stops it.

This is the song of the mud, the obscene, the filthy,
the putrid,
The vast liquid grave of our Armies—
It has drowned our men—
35 Its monstrous distended belly reeks with the
undigested dead—
Our men have gone down into it, sinking slowly, and
struggling and slowly disappearing.
Our fine men, our brave, strong young men,
Our glowing, red, shouting, brawny men,
Slowly, inch by inch, they have gone down into it.
40 Into its darkness, its thickness, its silence,
Relentlessly it drew them down, sucking them down,
They have been drowned there in thick, bitter,
heaving mud—
It hides them—oh, so many of them!

45 Under its smooth glistening surface it is hiding them
blandly,
There is not a trace of them—
There is no mark where they went down.
The mute, enormous mouth of the mud has closed
over them.

50 This is the song of the mud,
The beautiful, glistening, golden mud that covers the
hills like satin;
The mysterious, gleaming, silvery mud that is spread
like enamel over the valleys.
Mud, the fantastic disguise of the War Zone;
Mud, the extinguishing mantle of battles;
Mud, the smooth, fluid grave of our soldiers.
55 This is the song of the mud.

1917

Endnotes

- Note 1: French infantryman (informal term).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The white winter coat of the stoat; a highly valuable fur traditionally associated with royalty.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *stylishness (French)*[Return to reference °](#)

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) was educated at Marlborough College and Clare College, Cambridge (which he left without taking a degree). His father came from a prosperous family of Sephardic Jews, his mother from Anglican English gentry. As a young man he divided his time between literary London and the life of a country gentleman. These worlds and the brutally different one of the trenches, in which he found himself in 1914, are memorably described in his classic *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928) and its sequel, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930).

He fought at Mametz Wood and in the Somme Offensive of July 1916 with such conspicuous courage that he acquired the Military Cross and the nickname Mad Jack. After a sniper's bullet went through his chest, however, he was sent back to England at the beginning of April 1917, and he began to take a different view of the war. Eventually, with courage equal to any he had shown in action, he made public a letter he sent to his commanding officer: "I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it." Sassoon continued: "I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest." The military authorities, rather than make a martyr of him, announced that he was suffering from shell shock and sent him to a hospital near Edinburgh, where he met and befriended Wilfred Owen.

Sassoon's public protest may have been smothered, but his poems, with their shock tactics, bitter irony, and masterly use of direct speech (learned from Thomas Hardy), continued to attack the old men of the army, Church, and government, whom he held responsible for the miseries and murder of the young. His poems

satirically play on contrasts between romanticized notions of war and the grim realities. They angrily flaunt the grisly effects of violence: in "The Rear-Guard" a corpse is "a soft unanswering heap" whose "fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound."

Sassoon returned to the Western Front in 1918, was wounded again, and was again sent home. An increasingly reclusive country gentleman, he continued to write poetry, but his style never regained the satiric pungency of the war poems that made him famous. His 1933 marriage ended because of his homosexuality; and after he became a Roman Catholic in 1957, he wrote mainly devotional poems.

'They'

The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back
They will not be the same; for they'll have fought
In a just cause: they lead the last attack
On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought
New right to breed an honourable race,
5 They have challenged Death and dared him face to
face.'

'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.
'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find
10 A chap who's served that hasn't found *some* change.'
And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'

Oct. 31, 19161917

The Rear-Guard

*(Hindenburg Line, April 1917)*¹

Groping along the tunnel, step by step,
He winked his prying torch with patching glare
From side to side, and sniffed the unwholesome air.
Tins, boxes, bottles, shapes too vague to know;
A mirror smashed, the mattress from a bed;
5 And he, exploring fifty feet below
The rosy gloom of battle overhead.

Tripping, he grabbed the wall; saw some one lie
Humped at his feet, half-hidden by a rug,
And stooped to give the sleeper's arm a tug.
10 'I'm looking for headquarters.' No reply.
'God blast your neck!' (For days he'd had no sleep)
'Get up and guide me through this stinking place.'
Savage, he kicked a soft unanswering heap,
And flashed his beam across the livid face
15 Terribly glaring up, whose eyes yet wore
Agony dying hard ten days before;
And fists of fingers clutched a blackening wound.

Alone he staggered on until he found
Dawn's ghost that filtered down a shafted stair
20 To the dazed, muttering creatures underground
Who hear the boom of shells in muffled sound.
At last, with sweat of horror in his hair,
He climbed through darkness to the twilight air,
Unloading hell behind him step by step.

25
Apr. 22, 1917¹⁹¹⁸

Endnotes

- Note 1: In 1916 Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934) became commander in chief of the German armies and, for a time, blocked the Allied advance in western France with the massive defensive “line” named after him. Its barbed-wire entanglements, deep trenches, and gun emplacements ran from Lens to Rheims. [Return to reference 1](#)

The General

5 'Good-morning; good-morning!' the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras¹ with rifle and pack.

...

But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

Apr. 19171918

Endnotes

- Note 1: A city in northern France, in the front line through much of the war. The British assault on the Western Front that began on April 9, 1917, was known as the Battle of Arras.[Return to reference 1](#)

Glory of Women

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place.
You worship decorations; you believe
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
5 You make us shells.¹ You listen with delight,
By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.
You crown our distant ardours while we fight,
And mourn our laurelled² memories when we're
killed.
You can't believe that British troops 'retire'
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
10 Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.
O German mother dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.

19171918

Endnotes

- Note 1: Many women were recruited into munitions factories during the war.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In ancient Greece and Rome, victorious generals were crowned with laurel wreaths.[Return to reference 2](#)

Everyone Sang

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on—on—and out of
5 sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away . . . O, but Everyone
10 Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing
will never be done.

Apr. 19191919

On Passing the New Menin Gate¹

Who will remember, passing through this Gate,
The unheroic Dead who fed the guns?
Who shall absolve the foulness of their fate,—
Those doomed, conscripted, unvictorious ones?
5 Crudely renewed, the Salient² holds its own.
Paid are its dim defenders by this pomp;
Paid, with a pile of peace-complacent stone,
The armies who endured that sullen swamp.

Here was the world's worst wound. And here with
pride
10 'Their name liveth for ever,' the Gateway claims.
Was ever an immolation so belied
As these intolerably nameless names?
Well might the Dead who struggled in the slime
Rise and deride this sepulchre^o of crime.

1927–28 1928

Endnotes

- Note 1: The names of 54,889 men are engraved on this war memorial outside Brussels.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Protruding part of fortifications or, as here, lines of defensive trenches. Salients are particularly vulnerable, being exposed to enemy fire from the front and both sides.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *tomb* [Return to reference °](#)

From Memoirs of an Infantry Officer

[THE OPENING OF THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME]

On July [1916] the first the weather, after an early morning mist, was of the kind commonly called heavenly. Down in our frowsty cellar we breakfasted at six, unwashed and apprehensive. Our table, appropriately enough, was an empty ammunition box. At six-forty-five the final bombardment began, and there was nothing for us to do except sit round our candle until the tornado ended. For more than forty minutes the air vibrated and the earth rocked and shuddered. Through the sustained uproar the tap and rattle of machine-guns could be identified; but except for the whistle of bullets no retaliation came our way until a few 5.9¹ shells shook the roof of our dug-out. Barton and I sat speechless, deafened and stupefied by the seismic state of affairs, and when he lit a cigarette the match flame staggered crazily. Afterwards I asked him what he had been thinking about. His reply was 'Carpet slippers and Kettle-holders'. My own mind had been working in much the same style, for during that cannonading cataclysm the following refrain was running in my head:

*They come as a boon and a blessing to men,
The Something, the Owl, and the Waverley Pen.*

For the life of me I couldn't remember what the first one was called. Was it the Shakespeare? Was it the Dickens? Anyhow it was an advertisement which I'd often seen in smoky railway stations. Then the bombardment lifted and lessened, our vertigo abated, and we looked at one another in dazed relief. Two Brigades of our Division were now going over the top on our right. Our Brigade was to attack 'when the main assault had reached its final objective'. In

our fortunate rôle of privileged spectators Barton and I went up the stairs to see what we could from Kingston Road Trench. We left Jenkins crouching in a corner, where he remained most of the day. His haggard blinking face haunts my memory. He was an example of the paralysing effect which such an experience could produce on a nervous system sensitive to noise, for he was a good officer both before and afterwards. I felt no sympathy for him at the time, but I do now. From the support-trench, which Barton called 'our opera box', I observed as much of the battle as the formation of the country allowed, the rising ground on the right making it impossible to see anything of the attack towards Mametz. A small shiny black note-book contains my pencilled particulars, and nothing will be gained by embroidering them with afterthoughts. I cannot turn my field-glasses on to the past.²

7.45. The barrage is now working to the right of Fricourt and beyond. I can see the 21st Division advancing about three-quarters of a mile away on the left and a few Germans coming to meet them, apparently surrendering. Our men in small parties (not extended in line) go steadily on to the German front-line. Brilliant sunshine and a haze of smoke drifting along the landscape. Some Yorkshires³ a little way below on the left, watching the show and cheering as if at a football match. The noise almost as bad as ever.

9.30. Came back to dug-out and had a shave. 21st Division still going across the open, apparently without casualties. The sunlight flashes on bayonets as the tiny figures move quietly forward and disappear beyond mounds of trench debris. A few runners come back and ammunition parties go across. Trench-mortars are knocking hell out of Sunken Road trench and the ground where the Manchesters⁴ will attack soon. Noise not so bad now and very little retaliation.

9.50. Fricourt half-hidden by clouds of drifting smoke, blue, pinkish and grey. Shrapnel bursting in small bluish-white puffs with tiny flashes. The birds seem bewildered; a lark begins to go up and then flies feebly along, thinking better of it. Others flutter above the trench with querulous cries, weak on the wing. I can see seven of

our balloons,⁵ on the right. On the left our men still filing across in twenties and thirties. Another huge explosion in Fricourt and a cloud of brown-pink smoke. Some bursts are yellowish.

10.5. I can see the Manchesters down in New Trench, getting ready to go over. Figures filing down the trench. Two of them have gone out to look at our wire gaps!⁶ Have just eaten my last orange. . . I am staring at a sunlit picture of Hell, and still the breeze shakes the yellow weeds, and the poppies glow under Crawley Ridge where some shells fell a few minutes ago. Manchesters are sending forward some scouts. A bayonet glitters. A runner comes back across the open to their Battalion Headquarters, close here on the right. 21st Division still trotting along the sky line toward La Boisselle. Barrage going strong to the right of Contalmaison Ridge. Heavy shelling toward Mametz.

19161930

Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, 5.9-caliber (5.9-inch diameter).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The extracts that follow are edited versions of actual entries in Sassoon's diary. (See *Siegfried Sassoon: Diaries 1915–1918*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis, 1983, pp. 82–83.)[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Men of a Yorkshire regiment.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Men of the Manchester regiment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Long cables, tethering such balloons, prevented attacks by low-flying aircraft.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Holes, made by shell fire, in the long coils of barbed wire protecting the trenches.[Return to reference 6](#)

IVOR GURNEY

Ivor Bertie Gurney (1890–1937) was born in Gloucester and showed an early aptitude for music. After five years at the King's School, Gloucester, he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. He first acquired a modest reputation as a composer. After war broke out in August 1914, he enlisted; his battalion was sent to France the following year, and Gurney experienced the horrors of the Western Front. He was wounded in April 1917, and when in the hospital in Rouen, he sent some of his poems to friends in London. The resultant volume, *Severn and Somme*, was published that year. (The Severn is the English river at the head of whose estuary Gloucester is situated; it appears often in his poetry. The Somme is the northern French river that was the scene of some of the most murderous fighting in the war.) Gurney was returned to the front in time to take part in the grim Passchendaele offensive of the summer of 1917. He suffered the effects of a poison-gas attack on August 22 and was sent home, where he moved from hospital to hospital. He returned to the Royal College of Music to study under the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) and continued also to write poetry. His second book of poems, *War's Embers*, appeared in 1919. Gurney, now believed to have had schizophrenia, spent the last fifteen years of his life in psychiatric hospitals.

Gurney was a mere private in the war, unlike officers such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and his poems recapture with immediacy particular scenes and moments in the trenches. He was influenced by the poetry of Edward Thomas, with whom he shares a limpid directness, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose "terrible" sonnets are racked by despair. Though ruminating on traditional subjects such as landscape, nature, and mortality, Gurney dislocates these Georgian conventions through the compression, disharmony, and unredemptive language of his poetry. His "modern" techniques include syntactic contortions, colloquial diction, shifting rhythms and

rhymes, and enjambments that accentuate the jarring experience of war (a body described as “that red wet / Thing” in “To His Love”).

To His Love

He's gone, and all our plans
Are useless indeed.
We'll walk no more on Cotswold¹
Where the sheep feed
Quietly and take no heed.
5
His body that was so quick
Is not as you
Knew it, on Severn river^o
Under the blue
Driving our small boat through.
10
You would not know him now . . .
But still he died
Nobly, so cover him over
With violets of pride
Purple from Severn side.
15
Cover him, cover him soon!
And with thick-set
Masses of memoried flowers—
Hide that red wet
Thing I must somehow forget.
20

1919

Endnotes

- Note 1: Range of hills in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, in south central England.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *a British river* [Return to reference °](#)

The Silent One

Who died on the wires,¹ and hung there, one of two

—

Who for his hours of life had chattered through

Infinite lovely chatter of Bucks² accent:

Yet faced unbroken wires; stepped over, and went

5 A noble fool, faithful to his stripes—and ended.

But I weak, hungry, and willing only for the chance

Of line—to fight in the line, lay down under

unbroken

Wires, and saw the flashes and kept unshaken,

Till the politest voice—a finicking accent, said:

10 “Do you think you might crawl through there: there’s
a hole.”

Darkness, shot at: I smiled, as politely replied—

“I’m afraid not, Sir.” There was no hole no way to be
seen

Nothing but chance of death, after tearing of
clothes.

Kept flat, and watched the darkness, hearing bullets
whizzing—

15 And thought of music—and swore deep heart’s deep
oaths

(Polite to God) and retreated and came on again,

Again retreated—and a second time faced the
screen.

1954

Endnotes

- Note 1: The barbed wire protecting the front from infantry attack.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Buckinghamshire, in southern England.[Return to reference 2](#)

ISAAC ROSENBERG

Isaac Rosenberg (1890–1918) was born in Bristol to a poor Jewish family that moved to London in 1897. There, at Stepney, he attended elementary schools until the age of fourteen, when he became apprenticed as an engraver in a firm of art publishers and attended evening classes at the Art School of Birkbeck College. His first ambition was to be a painter, and in 1911, when his apprenticeship was over, a group of three Jewish women provided the means for his studying at the Slade School of Art. His interest in writing poetry steadily developed, and with his sister's encouragement he circulated copies of his poems among members of London's literary set and gained a certain reputation, though neither his poetry nor his painting won him any material success. In 1912 he brought out *Night and Day*, the first of three pamphlets of poetry published at his own expense. The other two were *Youth* (1915) and *Moses, A Play* (1916).

In 1915 Rosenberg enlisted in the army, and he was killed in action on April 1, 1918. After his death his reputation steadily grew as an unusually interesting and original poet, who, though he did not live to maturity, nevertheless broke new ground in imagery, rhythms, and the handling of dramatic effects. His poetry strangely amalgamates acerbic irony (the sardonic grin of a rat in "Break of Day in the Trenches") with lush, resonant, even biblical diction and imagery ("shrieking iron and flame / Hurlled through still heavens"). The fierce apprehension of the physical reality of war, the exclamatory directness of the language, and the vivid sense of involvement distinguish his poems. Perhaps Rosenberg's working-class background had something to do with this vividness: like Ivor Gurney and David Jones, he served in the ranks.

Break of Day in the Trenches

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid¹ Time as ever,
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
5 As I pull the parapet's² poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
Now you have touched this English hand
10 You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between.
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
15 Less chanced than you for life,
Bonds to the whims of murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
The torn fields of France.
What do you see in our eyes
20 At the shrieking iron and flame
Hurled through still heavens?
What quaver—what heart aghast?
Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
Drop, and are ever dropping;
25 But mine in my ear is safe—
Just a little white with the dust.

June 19161922

A

In the Trenches
The darkness crumbles away,
It is the same old Dread Time as ever.
Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer ^{sardonic} ~~uncanny~~ rat
as I pull a poppy from the parapet
To stick behind my ear.
Droll ^{subterranean} ~~subterranean~~ ~~rat~~ ~~thing~~
They would shoot you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies
(And Lord knows what antipathies)
For you have touched an English hand,
And will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the poppy blooded field between
Our hands will touch through your feet.
It seems odd thing, you grin, as you pass
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes
Less chanced than you for life
Helpless whims of Murder,
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth
pTo

"Break of Day in the Trenches." Rosenberg wrote poems on scraps of paper he found while fighting in World War I. His manuscript papers still have mud on them from the trenches. This early draft page of one of the war's most famous poems includes words and lines that Rosenberg subsequently revised or

omitted. Rosenberg changed, for example, “queer uncanny rat” to “queer sardonic rat” and deleted the line “(and Lord knows what antipathies),” which once rhymed with the rat’s “cosmopolitan sympathies.”

Endnotes

- Note 1: Ancient Celtic priest.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Wall protecting a trench.[Return to reference 2](#)

Louse Hunting

Nudes—stark and glistening,
Yelling in lurid glee. Grinning faces
And raging limbs
Whirl over the floor one fire.
For a shirt verminously busy
5 Yon soldier tore from his throat, with oaths
Godhead might shrink at, but not the lice.
And soon the shirt was aflare
Over the candle he'd lit while we lay.

10 Then we all sprang up and stript
To hunt the verminous brood.
Soon like a demons' pantomime
The place was raging.
See the silhouettes agape,
See the gibbering shadows
15 Mixed with the battled arms on the wall.
See gargantuan hooked fingers
Pluck in supreme flesh
To smutch ^o supreme littleness.
20 See the merry limbs in hot Highland fling¹
Because some wizard vermin
Charmed from the quiet this revel
When our ears were half lulled
By the dark music
Blown from Sleep's trumpet.

25
19171922

Endnotes

- Note 1: In wild Scottish dance.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *blacken, besmirch*[Return to reference °](#)

Returning, We Hear the Larks

Sombre the night is.
And though we have our lives, we know
What sinister threat lurks there.

5 Dragging these anguished limbs, we only know
This poison-blasted track opens on our camp—
On a little safe sleep.

But hark! joy—joy—strange joy.
Lo! heights of night ringing with unseen larks.
Music showering on our upturned list'ning faces.

10 Death could drop from the dark
As easily as song—
But song only dropped,
Like a blind man's dreams on the sand
By dangerous tides,
15 Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies
there,
Or her kisses where a serpent hides.

19171922

Dead Man's Dump

The plunging limbers¹ over the shattered track
Racketed with their rusty freight,
Stuck out like many crowns of thorns,
And the rusty stakes like sceptres old
To stay the flood of brutish men
5 Upon our brothers dear.

The wheels lurched over sprawled dead
But pained them not, though their bones crunched,
Their shut mouths made no moan.
They lie there huddled, friend and foeman,
10 Man born of man, and born of woman,
And shells go crying over them
From night till night and now.

Earth has waited for them,
All the time of their growth
15 Fretting for their decay:
Now she has them at last!
In the strength of their strength
Suspended—stopped and held.

What fierce imaginings their dark souls lit?
20 Earth! have they gone into you?
Somewhere they must have gone,
And flung on your hard back
Is their soul's sack,
Emptied of God-ancestral essences.
25 Who hurled them out? Who hurled?

None saw their spirits' shadow shake the grass,

Or stood aside for the half-used life to pass
Out of those doomed nostrils and the doomed
mouth,
30 When the swift iron burning bee
Drained the wild honey of their youth.

What of us who, flung on the shrieking pyre,
Walk, our usual thoughts untouched,
Our lucky limbs as on ichor² fed,
Immortal seeming ever?
35 Perhaps when the flames beat loud on us,
A fear may choke in our veins
And the startled blood may stop.

The air is loud with death,
The dark air spurts with fire,
40 The explosions ceaseless are.
Timelessly now, some minutes past,
These dead strode time with vigorous life,
Till the shrapnel called "An end!"
But not to all. In bleeding pangs
45 Some borne on stretchers dreamed of home,
Dear things, war-blotted from their hearts.

A man's brains splattered on
A stretcher-bearer's face;
His shook shoulders slipped their load,
50 But when they bent to look again
The drowning soul was sunk too deep
For human tenderness.

They left this dead with the older dead,
55 Stretched at the crossroads.

Burnt black by strange decay
Their sinister faces lie;

60 The lid over each eye,
The grass and coloured clay
More motion have than they,
Joined to the great sunk silences.

65 Here is one not long dead;
His dark hearing caught our far wheels,
And the choked soul stretched weak hands
To reach the living word the far wheels said,
The blood-dazed intelligence beating for light,
Crying through the suspense of the far torturing
wheels
Swift for the end to break,
Or the wheels to break,
70 Cried as the tide of the world broke over his sight.

75 Will they come? Will they ever come?
Even as the mixed hoofs of the mules,
The quivering-bellied mules,
And the rushing wheels all mixed
With his tortured upturned sight.
So we crashed round the bend,
We heard his weak scream,
We heard his very last sound,
And our wheels grazed his dead face.

19171922

Endnotes

- Note 1: Two-wheeled carts, here carrying barbed wire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In Greek mythology, the ethereal fluid that flowed in the veins of the gods.[Return to reference 2](#)

WILFRED OWEN

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) was brought up in the backstreets of Birkenhead and Shrewsbury, and on leaving school he took up a post as lay assistant to a country vicar. Removed from the influence of a devout mother, he became increasingly critical of the Church's role in society. His letters and poems of this period show an emerging awareness of the poor's sufferings and the first stirrings of the compassion that was to characterize his later poems about the Western Front. In 1913 he broke with the vicar and went to teach English in France.

For more than a year after the outbreak of war, Owen could not decide whether he ought to enlist. Finally he did, and from January to May 1917 he fought as an officer in the Battle of the Somme. Then, suffering from shell shock, he was sent to a hospital near Edinburgh, where he had the good fortune to meet Siegfried Sassoon, whose first fiercely realistic war poems had just appeared. The influence of Sassoon's satiric realism was a useful tonic to Owen's lush, Keatsian Romanticism. Throughout his months in the hospital, Owen suffered from the horrendous nightmares symptomatic of shell shock. The experience of battle, banished from his waking mind, erupted into his dreams and then into poems haunted with obsessive images of blinded eyes ("Dulce et Decorum Est") and the mouth of hell ("Miners" and "Strange Meeting"). The distinctive music of such later poems owes much of its power to Owen's mastery of alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, half-rhyme, and the pararhyme that he pioneered. This last technique, the rhyming of two words with identical or similar consonants but differing, stressed vowels (such as *groined* / *groaned*, *killed* / *cold*, *hall* / *hell*), of which the second is usually the lower in pitch, produces effects of dissonance, failure, and unfulfillment that subtly reinforce his themes.

Echoing Dante, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, and the Bible, Owen puts literary and religious language into jarring new relationships with the absurdities of modern war experience. He recuperates but distorts the conventions of pastoral elegy, relocating them to scenes of terror, extreme pain, and irredeemable mass death.

In the year of life left to him after leaving the hospital in November 1917, Owen matured rapidly. Success as a soldier, marked by the award of the Military Cross, and as a poet, which had won him the recognition of his peers, gave him a new confidence. He wrote eloquently of the tragedy of young men killed in battle. In his later elegies a disciplined sensuality and a passionate intelligence find their fullest, most moving, and most memorable expression.

Owen was killed in action a week before the war ended.

Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
—Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.°
5 No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.°

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
10 Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

Sept.–Oct. 1917/1920

Notes

- °: *prayers*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *counties*[Return to reference](#) °

Apologia Pro Poemate Meo¹

I, too, saw God through mud,—
The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches
smiled.
War brought more glory to their eyes than blood,
And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a
child.

5 Merry it was to laugh there—
Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.
For power was on us as we slashed bones bare
Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder.

10 I, too, have dropped off Fear—
Behind the barrage, dead as my platoon,
And sailed my spirit surging light and clear
Past the entanglement where hopes lay strewn;

And witnessed exultation—²
Faces that used to curse me, scowl for scowl,
Shine and lift up with passion of oblation,³
15 Seraphic^o for an hour; though they were foul.

I have made fellowships—
Untold of happy lovers in old song.
For love is not the binding of fair lips
20 With the soft silk of eyes that look and long,

By Joy, whose ribbon slips,—
But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are
strong;
Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;

Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong.

25 I have perceived much beauty
In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight;
Heard music in the silentness of duty;
Found peace where shell-storms spouted reddest
spate.

30 Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare
And heaven but as the highway for a shell,

You shall not hear their mirth:
You shall not come to think them well content
By any jest of mine. These men are worth
35 Your tears. You are not worth their merriment.

Nov.–Dec. 1917/1920

Endnotes

- Note 1: This Latin title, meaning “Apology for My Poem,” may have been prompted by that of Cardinal Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, “Apology for His Life.” Here an apology is a written vindication rather than a remorseful account.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*: “Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted. . . . It exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sacrifice offered to God.[Return to reference 3](#)

Notes

- °: *ecstatic* [Return to reference °](#)

Miners¹

There was a whispering in my hearth,
A sigh of the coal,
Grown wistful of a former earth
It might recall.

5 I listened for a tale of leaves
And smothered ferns,
Frond-forests, and the low sly lives
Before the fauns.

My fire might show steam-phantoms simmer
From Time's old cauldron,
10 Before the birds made nests in summer,
Or men had children.

But the coals were murmuring of their mine,
And moans down there
Of boys that slept wry sleep, and men
15 Writhing for air.

And I saw white bones in the cinder-shard,
Bones without number.
Many the muscled bodies charred,
And few remember.
20

I thought of all that worked dark pits
Of war,² and died
Digging the rock where Death reputes
Peace lies indeed.

Comforted years will sit soft-chaired,

25 In rooms of amber;
The years will stretch their hands, well-cheered
 By our life's ember;

30 The centuries will burn rich loads
 With which we groaned,
Whose warmth shall lull their dreaming lids,
 While songs are crooned;
But they will not dream of us poor lads,
 Left in the ground.

Jan. 19181931

Endnotes

- Note 1: Wrote a poem on the Colliery Disaster [of Jan. 12, 1918, at Halmerend]: but I get mixed up with the War at the end. It is short, but oh! sour [Owen's Jan. 14 letter to his mother]. The explosion killed about 150 miners.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Miners who dug tunnels under no-man's-land in which to detonate mines beneath the enemy trenches.[Return to reference 2](#)

Dulce Et Decorum Est¹

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through
sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
5 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines² that dropped
behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
10 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .
Dim, through the misty panes³ and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

15 In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
20 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend,⁴ you would not tell with such high zest
25 To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Oct. 1917–Mar. 1918/1920

Dulce et Decorum est.

41

~~To Jessie Pope etc.~~ To a certain Poetess.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the ~~clanking~~ ^{haunting} flares we turned our backs.
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Dead slow we moved. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of ~~disappointed shells~~ ^{that dropped behind.}
Of ~~tired-voices~~ ^{five-nines} that dropped behind.

Then somewhere near in front: Whew... fup... fop... fup...
Gas-shells or duds? We loosened masks, in case -
And listened... Nothing... Far rumouring of Krupp;
Then ~~smashed~~ ^{stinging} poison hit us in the face.
Gas! GAS! - ~~An ecstasy of~~ An ecstasy of fumbling. ?
Quick, boys!

Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time.
But someone still was yelling out, and stumbling,
And floundering like a man in fire or lime. -
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a dark sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He ~~plunges~~ ^{gargling} at me, ~~gargling~~ ^{gargling} choking, drowning.
~~gargling~~
~~guttering~~

"Dulce et Decorum est." This manuscript draft page of Owen's famous poem includes four lines at the beginning of the second

stanza that introduce the horrific gas attack. The poem becomes more powerful when, in its final version, Owen deletes this transitional material, confronting the reader with the terror-stricken cry "Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!" Owen tries out several different participles to describe the gassed soldier before settling on "guttering."

Endnotes

- Note 1: The famous Latin tag [from Horace, *Odes* 3.2.13] means, of course, *It is sweet and meet to die for one's country. Sweet! And decorous!* [Owen's Oct. 16, 1917, letter to his mother].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, 5.9-caliber shells.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of the gas mask's celluloid window.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jessie Pope, to whom the poem was originally to have been dedicated, published jingoistic war poems urging young men to enlist.[Return to reference 4](#)

Strange Meeting¹

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel,² long since
scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.^o

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
5 Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,—
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

10 With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made
moan.

"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said that other, "save the undone years,
15 The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
20 And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.³
25 Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.

They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.
None will break ranks, though nations trek from
progress.

30 Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-
wheels,

35 I would go up and wash them from sweet wells.
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint,⁴
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess⁵ of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

40 "I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . ."

May [?] 19181920

Endnotes

- Note 1:
See Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, lines 1828–32:

And one whose spear had pierced me, leaned beside,
With quivering lips and humid eyes;—and all
Seemed like some brothers on a journey wide
Gone forth, whom now strange meeting did befall
In a strange land.

The speaker of Owen's poem imagines his victim a poet like himself.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: See Sassoon's "The Rear-Guard" (p. 156).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity [Owen's draft preface to his poems].[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," line 203 of William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Luck, as in the phrase *bad cess to you* (may evil befall you), and muck or excrement, as in the word *cesspool*.[Return to reference 5](#)

Notes

- °: *grooved*[Return to reference °](#)

Futility

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
5 Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides
10 Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

May 19181920

Disabled

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
5 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

...

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,—
10 In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

...

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
15 Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.
20

...

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,

After the matches, carried shoulder-high.¹
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,²
He thought he'd better join.—He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
25 That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts³
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.⁴
Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
30 And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks;⁵ of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps;⁶ and hints for young recruits.
35 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and
cheers.

...

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer
Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

...

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
40 And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
45 And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

Oct. 1917–July 19181920

Endnotes

- Note 1: See Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" (p. 139, lines 1–4).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Slang for a drink, usually brandy and soda.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Capricious women.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The recruiting officers entered on his enlistment form his lie that he was nineteen years old and, therefore, above the minimum age for military service.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Kilted Scottish Highlanders used to carry a small ornamental dagger in the top of a stocking.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Regard for the honor and interests of an organization or, as here, a military unit (French). "Pay arrears": back pay.[Return to reference 6](#)

From Owen's Letters to His Mother

16 January 1917

* * *

I can see no excuse for deceiving you about these last 4 days. I have suffered seventh hell.

I have not been at the front.

I have been in front of it.

I held an advanced post, that is, a 'dug-out' in the middle of No Man's Land.

We had a march of 3 miles over shelled road then nearly 3 along a flooded trench. After that we came to where the trenches had been blown flat out and had to go over the top. It was of course dark, too dark, and the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, 3, 4, and 5 feet deep, relieved only by craters full of water. Men have been known to drown in them. Many stuck in the mud & only got on by leaving their waders, equipment, and in some cases their clothes.

High explosives were dropping all around out, and machine guns spluttered every few minutes. But it was so dark that even the German flares did not reveal us.

Three quarters dead, I mean each of us 3/4 dead, we reached the dug-out, and relieved the wretches therein. I then had to go forth and find another dugout for a still more advanced post where I left 18 bombers. I was responsible for other posts on the left but there was a junior officer in charge.

My dug-out held 25 men tight packed. Water filled it to a depth of 1 or 2 feet, leaving say 4 feet of air.

One entrance had been blown in & blocked.

So far, the other remained.

The Germans knew we were staying there and decided we shouldn't.

Those fifty hours were the agony of my happy life.

Every ten minutes on Sunday afternoon seemed an hour.

I nearly broke down and let myself drown in the water that was now slowly rising over my knees.

Towards 6 o'clock, when, I suppose, you would be going to church, the shelling grew less intense and less accurate: so that I was mercifully helped to do my duty and crawl, wade, climb and flounder over No Man's Land to visit my other post. It took me half an hour to move about 150 yards.

I was chiefly annoyed by our own machine guns from behind. The seeng-seeng-seeng of the bullets reminded me of Mary's canary. On the whole I can support¹ the canary better.

In the Platoon on my left the sentries over the dug-out were blown to nothing. One of these poor fellows was my first servant whom I rejected. If I had kept him he would have lived, for servants don't do Sentry Duty. I kept my own sentries half way down the stairs during the more terrific bombardment. In spite of this one lad was blown down and, I am afraid, blinded.²

31 December 1917

Last year, at this time, (it is just midnight, and now is the intolerable instant of the Change) last year I lay awake in a windy tent in the middle of a vast, dreadful encampment. It seemed neither France nor England, but a kind of paddock where the beasts are kept a few days before the shambles.³ I heard the revelling of the Scotch troops, who are now dead, and who knew they would be dead. I thought of this present night, and whether I should indeed—whether we should indeed—whether you would indeed—but I thought neither long nor deeply, for I am a master of elision.

But chiefly I thought of the very strange look on all faces in that c an incomprehensible look, which a man will never see in England,

though wars should be in England; nor can it be seen in any battle.
But only in Étaples.⁴

It was not despair, or terror, it was more terrible than terror, for it was a blindfold look, and without expression, like a dead rabbit's.

It will never be painted, and no actor will ever seize it. And to describe it, I think I must go back and be with them.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Tolerate. Mary: Owen's sister.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: This incident prompted Owen's poem "The Sentry."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Slaughterhouse.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Until 1914, a fishing port of 5,800 inhabitants, Étaples and its surrounding hills housed 100,000 soldiers on their way to and from the front in 1917.[Return to reference 4](#)

Preface¹

This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them.

Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War.²

Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.

My subject is War, and the pity of War.

The Poetry is in the pity.

Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.

(If I thought the letter of this book would last, I might have used proper names; but if the spirit of it survives—survives Prussia³—my ambition and those names will have achieved fresher fields than Flanders.⁴ . . .)

19181920

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In May 1918 Wilfred Owen was posted in Ripon, North Yorkshire, England, and was preparing a book of his war poems. Around this time he drafted this unfinished preface, which was published posthumously, along with most of his poems, in *Poems* (1920), edited by his friend the poet Siegfried Sassoon. The text is reprinted from *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (1985), ed. Jon Stallworthy.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Jude 1:25: "To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and

ever.”[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Dominant region of the German Empire until the end of World War I.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In western Belgium, site of the front line. The Canadian poet John McCrae (1872–1918) memorialized one devastating 1915 battle in his famous poem “In Flanders Fields.”[Return to reference 4](#)

MAY WEDDERBURN CANNAN

Born and educated in Oxford, May Wedderburn Cannan (1893–1973) was the daughter of the secretary to the delegates (or chief executive) of the Oxford University Press. At eighteen, she joined the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment, and when England entered the war three years later, she was active in the Red Cross mobilization, setting up a hospital in a local school. During the early part of the war, she worked at Oxford University Press, continued her volunteer nursing, and spent a month as a volunteer worker in a soldiers' canteen in Rouen, France. In 1918 she joined the War Office in Paris to work in intelligence. Her fiancé, Bevil Quiller-Couch, survived the devastating Battle of the Somme and the remainder of the war, only to die of pneumonia several months after the armistice. Cannan later worked at King's College, London, and at the Athenaeum Club as assistant librarian. She wrote three books of poems—*In War Time* (1917), *The Splendid Days* (1919), and *The House of Hope* (1923)—as well as a novel, *The Lonely Generation* (1934). Her unfinished autobiography, *Grey Ghosts and Voices*, was published posthumously in 1976.

"Rouen," with its echoes of G. K. Chesterton's incantatory "Tarantella" (beginning "Do you remember an Inn, / Miranda?"), voices emotions closer to those of Rupert Brooke's "The Soldier" than to any given expression by the other soldier poets in this section. In 1917, however, Cannan and Brooke spoke for what was then the majority. As she noted in her autobiography: "Siegfried Sassoon wrote to the Press from France saying that the war was now a war of conquest and without justification, and declared himself to be a conscientious objector. . . . A saying went round, 'Went to the war with Rupert Brooke and came home with Siegfried Sassoon.' " Her own poems pose an alternative to protest and despair: "I had much admired some of Sassoon's verse but I was not coming home with him. Someone must go on writing for those who

were still convinced of the right of the cause for which they had taken up arms.”

Rouen

26 April–25 May 1915

Early morning over Rouen, hopeful, high, courageous
morning,
And the laughter of adventure and the steepness of
the stair,
And the dawn across the river, and the wind across
the bridges,
And the empty littered station and the tired people
there.

5 Can you recall those mornings and the hurry of
awakening,
And the long-forgotten wonder if we should miss the
way,
And the unfamiliar faces, and the coming of
provisions,
And the freshness and the glory of the labour of the
day?

10 Hot noontide over Rouen, and the sun upon the city,
Sun and dust unceasing, and the glare of cloudless
skies,
And the voices of the Indians and the endless stream
of soldiers,
And the clicking of the tatties,¹ and the buzzing of
the flies.

Can you recall those noontides and the reek of
steam and coffee,

Heavy-laden noontides with the evening's peace to
win,
15 And the little piles of Woodbines,² and the sticky
soda bottles,
And the crushes³ in the "Parlour," and the letters
coming in?

Quiet night-time over Rouen, and the station full of
soldiers,
All the youth and pride of England from the ends of
all the earth;
And the rifles piled together, and the creaking of the
sword-belts,
20 And the faces bent above them, and the gay, heart-
breaking mirth.

Can I forget the passage from the cool white-bedded
Aid Post
Past the long sun-blistered coaches of the khaki Red
Cross train
To the truck train full of wounded, and the weariness
and laughter,
And "Good-bye, and thank-you, Sister,"⁴ and the
empty yards again?

25 Can you recall the parcels that we made them for
the railroad,
Crammed and bulging parcels held together by their
string,
And the voices of the sergeants who called the
Drafts⁵ together,
And the agony and splendour when they stood to
save the King?⁶

Can you forget their passing, the cheering and the
waving,

30 The little group of people at the doorway of the
shed,
The sudden awful silence when the last train swung
to darkness,
And the lonely desolation, and the mocking stars
o'erhead?

Can you recall the midnights, and the footsteps of
night watchers,
Men who came from darkness and went back to dark
again,
35 And the shadows on the rail-lines and the all-
inglorious labour,
And the promise of the daylight firing blue the
window-pane?

Can you recall the passing through the kitchen door
to morning,
Morning very still and solemn breaking slowly on the
town,
And the early coastways engines that had met the
ships at daybreak,
40 And the Drafts just out from England, and the day
shift coming down?

Can you forget returning slowly, stumbling on the
cobble,
And the white-decked Red Cross barges dropping
seawards for the tide,
And the search for English papers, and the blessed
cool of water,
And the peace of half-closed shutters that shut out
the world outside?

45 Can I forget the evenings and the sunsets on the
island,

And the tall black ships at anchor far below our
balcony,
And the distant call of bugles, and the white wine in
the glasses,
And the long line of the street lamps, stretching
Eastwards to the sea?

50 . . . When the world slips slow to darkness, when the
office fire burns lower,
My heart goes out to Rouen, Rouen all the world
away;
When other men remember I remember our
Adventure
And the trains that go from Rouen at the ending of
the day.

1916

Endnotes

- Note 1: Screens or mats hung in a doorway and kept wet to cool and freshen the air.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Popular brand of cheap cigarette.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Crowded social gatherings.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Nurse.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Groups of soldiers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, to sing the British national anthem, "God Save the King."[Return to reference 6](#)

ROBERT GRAVES

Robert von Ranke Graves (1895–1985) was born in London of partly Anglo-Irish and partly German descent—his great-uncle was the distinguished German historian Leopold von Ranke. He left Charterhouse School to go immediately into the army, serving in World War I until he was invalided out in 1917. After the war he went to Oxford, took a B.Litt. degree, and in 1929 published *Goodbye to All That*, a vivid account of his experiences in the war, including his almost dying from severe chest wounds. His autobiography, as he put it, “paid my debts and enabled me to set up in Majorca as a writer.” He lived on that Spanish island with the American poet Laura Riding—his muse and mentor—until in 1936 the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War forced them to leave. Their relationship soon ended, and after World War II he returned to Majorca, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Graves began as a Georgian poet, but he was a Georgian with a difference. The mingling of the colloquial and the visionary in his vocabulary, the accent of conversation underlying the regular rhythms of his stanzas, the tension between a Romantic indulgence in emotion and a cool appraisal of its significance—these are qualities found even in his early poetry. His best work combines the ironic and the imaginative in a highly individual manner, and he is also capable of a down-to-earth poetry, often mocking in tone and dealing with simple domestic facts or even the more annoying of personal relationships. He admired Thomas Hardy but chided Yeats, Pound, and Eliot for their obscurity and slovenliness, preferring that poetry be lucid, orderly, and civil.

Graves made his living by his prose, which is extensive and varied and includes, in addition to *Goodbye to All That*, a number of historical novels in which characters and events from the classical or biblical past are reconstructed in a modern idiom: the most notable of his historical novels are *I, Claudius* (1934), *Claudius the God*

(1934), and *King Jesus* (1946). In *The White Goddess* (1948), a study of mythology drawn from a variety of sources and devoted to what he considered the female inspirational principle, Graves argued that only a return to goddess worship and an abandonment of patriarchal for matriarchal society could help modern poetry recover its lost force, clarity, and mythic wisdom.

From Goodbye to All That

[THE ATTACK ON HIGH WOOD]

Next evening, July 19th, we were relieved and told that we would be attacking High Wood,¹ which could be seen a thousand yards away to the right at the top of a slope. High Wood, which the French called 'Raven Wood', formed part of the main German battle-line that ran along the ridge, with Delville Wood not far off on the German left. Two British brigades had already attempted it; in both cases a counter-attack drove them out again. The Royal Welch² were now reduced by casualties to about four hundred strong, including transport, stretcher-bearers, cooks and other non-combatants. I took command of 'B' Company.

The German batteries were handing out heavy stuff, six- and eight-inch, and so much of it that we decided to move back fifty yards at a rush. As we did so, an eight-inch shell burst three paces behind me. I heard the explosion, and felt as though I had been punched rather hard between the shoulder-blades, but without any pain. I took the punch merely for the shock of the explosion; but blood trickled into my eye and, turning faint, I called to Moodie: 'I've been hit.' Then I fell. A minute or two before I had got two very small wounds on my left hand; and in exactly the same position as the two that drew blood from my right hand during the preliminary bombardment at Loos.³ This I took as a lucky sign, and for further security repeated to myself a line of Nietzsche's, in French translation:

*Non, tu ne me peux pas tuer!*⁴

One piece of shell went through my left thigh, high up, near the groin; I must have been at the full stretch of my stride to escape emasculation. The wound over the eye was made by a little chip of

marble, possibly from one of the Bazentin⁵ cemetery headstones. [Later, I had it cut out, but a smaller piece has since risen to the surface under my right eyebrow, where I keep it for a souvenir.] This, and a finger-wound which split the bone, probably came from another shell bursting in front of me. But a piece of shell had also gone in two inches below the point of my right shoulder-blade and came out through my chest two inches above the right nipple.

My memory of what happened then is vague. Apparently Dr Dunn came up through the barrage with a stretcher-party, dressed my wound, and got me down to the old German dressing-station at the north end of Mametz Wood.⁶ I remember being put on the stretcher, and winking at the stretcher-bearer sergeant who had just said: 'Old Gravy's got it, all right!' They laid my stretcher in a corner of the dressing-station, where I remained unconscious for more than twenty-four hours.

Late that night, Colonel Crawshay came back from High Wood and visited the dressing-station; he saw me lying in the corner, and they told him I was done for. The next morning, July 21st, clearing away the dead, they found me still breathing and put me on an ambulance for Heilly, the nearest field hospital. The pain of being jolted down the Happy Valley, with a shell hole at every three or four yards of the road, woke me up. I remember screaming. But back on the better roads I became unconscious again. That morning, Crawshay wrote the usual formal letters of condolence to the next-of-kin of the six or seven officers who had been killed. This was his letter to my mother:

22.7.16

Dear Mrs Graves,

I very much regret to have to write and tell you your son has died of wounds. He was very gallant, and was doing so well and is a great loss.

He was hit by a shell and very badly wounded, and died on the way down to the base I believe. He was not in bad pain,

and our doctor managed to get across and attend to him at once.

We have had a very hard time, and our casualties have been large. Believe me you have all our sympathy in your loss, and we have lost a very gallant soldier.

Please write to me if I can tell you or do anything.

Yours sincerely,
C. Crawshay, Lt.-Col.

Then he made out the official casualty list—a long one, because only eighty men were left in the battalion—and reported me ‘died of wounds’. Heilly lay on the railway; close to the station stood the hospital tents with the red cross prominently painted on the roofs, to discourage air-bombing. Fine July weather made the tents insufferably hot. I was semi-conscious now, and aware of my lung-wound through a shortness of breath. It amused me to watch the little bubbles of blood, like scarlet soap-bubbles, which my breath made in escaping through the opening of the wound. The doctor came over to my bed. I felt sorry for him; he looked as though he had not slept for days.

I asked him: ‘Can I have a drink?’

‘Would you like some tea?’

I whispered: ‘Not with condensed milk.’

He said, most apologetically: ‘I’m afraid there’s no fresh milk.’

Tears of disappointment pricked my eyes; I expected better of a hospital behind the lines.

‘Will you have some water?’

‘Not if it’s boiled.’

‘It is boiled. And I’m afraid I can’t give you anything alcoholic in your present condition.’

‘Some fruit then?’

‘I have seen no fruit for days.’

Yet a few minutes later he returned with two rather unripe greengages.⁷ In whispers I promised him a whole orchard when I

recovered.

The nights of the 22nd and 23rd were horrible. Early on the morning of the 24th, when the doctor came round the ward, I said: 'You must send me away from here. This heat will kill me.' It was beating on my head through the canvas.

'Stick it out. Your best chance is to lie here and not to be moved. You'd not reach the Base alive.'

'Let me risk the move. I'll be all right, you'll see.'

Half an hour later he returned. 'Well, you're having it your way. I've just got orders to evacuate every case in the hospital. Apparently the Guards have been in it up at Delville Wood, and they'll all be coming down tonight.' I did not fear that I would die, now—it was enough to be honourably wounded and bound for home.

A brigade-major, wounded in the leg, who lay in the next bed, gave me news of the battalion. He looked at my label and said: 'I see you're in the Second Royal Welch. I watched your High Wood show through field-glasses. The way your battalion shook out into artillery formation, company by company—with each section of four or five men in file at fifty yards interval and distance—going down into the hollow and up the slope through the barrage, was the most beautiful bit of parade-ground drill I've ever seen. Your company officers must have been superb.' Yet one company at least had started without a single officer. When I asked whether they had held the wood, he told me: 'They hung on to the near end. I believe what happened was that the Public Schools Battalion came away at dark; and so did most of the Scotsmen. Your chaps were left there more or less alone for some time. They steadied themselves by singing. Afterwards the chaplain—R.C.⁸ of course—Father McCabe, brought the Scotsmen back. Being Glasgow Catholics, they would follow a priest where they wouldn't follow an officer. The centre of the wood was impossible for either the Germans or your fellows to hold—a terrific concentration of artillery on it. The trees were splintered to matchwood. Late that night a brigade of the Seventh Division relieved the survivors; it included your First Battalion.'

Endnotes

- Note 1: The battle for High Wood, one of the bloodiest fights of the Somme Offensive, began on July 14, 1916, and was won by the British on September 15, 1916.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Royal Welch Fusiliers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Battle of Loos, September 1915.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: No, you cannot kill me. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Battle of Bazentin Ridge, July 14–17, 1916, part of the Somme Offensive.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Recently captured by the British.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Type of plum.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Roman Catholic.[Return to reference 8](#)

Recalling War

Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
The track aches only when the rain reminds.
The one-legged man forgets his leg of wood,
The one-armed man his jointed wooden arm.
5 The blinded man sees with his ears and hands
As much or more than once with both his eyes.
Their war was fought these twenty years ago
And now assumes the nature-look of time,
As when the morning traveller turns and views
10 His wild night-stumbling carved into a hill.

What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags
But an infection of the common sky
That sagged ominously upon the earth
Even when the season was the airiest May.
15 Down pressed the sky, and we, oppressed, thrust
out
Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.
Natural infirmities were out of mode,
For Death was young again: patron alone
Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

20 Fear made fine bed-fellows. Sick with delight
At life's discovered transitoriness,
Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.
Never was such antiqueness of romance,
Such tasty honey oozing from the heart.
And old importances came swimming back—
25 Wine, meat, log-fires, a roof over the head,
A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call.
Even there was a use again for God—

30 A word of rage in lack of meat, wine, fire,
In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

War was return of earth to ugly earth,
War was foundering^o of sublimities,
Extinction of each happy art and faith
By which the world had still kept head in air,
35 Protesting logic or protesting love,
Until the unendurable moment struck—
The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

And we recall the merry ways of guns—
Nibbling the walls of factory and church
40 Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
Like a child, dandelions with a switch.
Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
A sight to be recalled in elder days
45 When learnedly the future we devote
To yet more boastful visions of despair.

19351938

Notes

- ^o: *collapsing*[Return to reference ^o](#)

DAVID JONES

David Jones (1895–1974) was born in Brockley, Kent, the son of a Welsh father and an English mother. He studied at the Camberwell School of Art before joining the army in January 1915; he served as a private soldier until the end of World War I—service that provided the material for his modern epic of war, *In Parenthesis*. He attended Westminster Art School after the war and subsequently made a name for himself as an illustrator, engraver, and watercolorist. In 1921 he joined the Roman Catholic Church and a few months later began working with the Catholic stone carver and engraver Eric Gill. Jones's Welsh and English origins, his visual sensitivity as an artist, and his interest in Catholic liturgy and ritual can be seen in his literary work, which includes the obscure but powerful long religious poem *The Anathémata* (1952) and *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (1973).

In Parenthesis, Jones's first literary work, was published in 1937 and won the Hawthornden Prize. Its seven parts, combining prose and poetry, evoke the activities of a British infantry unit from its training in England to its participation in the Somme Offensive of July 1916. The work proceeds chronologically, beginning with a battalion parade in England before embarkation for France, moving to the preparation for the offensive, and concluding when the protagonist Private John Ball's platoon is destroyed. Far from a straightforward narrative, since every contemporary detail is associated with the heroic past, the poem echoes in carefully patterned moments Shakespeare's history plays, Malory's accounts of Arthurian quests, Welsh epics of heroic and futile battles, the Bible, and Catholic liturgy. Even so, *In Parenthesis* avoids the traditional epic concentration on high-ranking heroes and builds its narrative around ordinary characters, both English and Welsh. Identified with historical or mythological figures, they—Mr. Jenkins, Sergeant Snell, Corporal Quilter, Lance-Corporal Lewis, and John

Ball, who is wounded in the leg, as Jones was at the First Battle of the Somme—are presented in vivid silhouettes and sudden stabs of personal memory.

Begun a decade after the armistice, *In Parenthesis* could not have been written when Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon wrote their war poems. Jones profits from the ways in which James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* drew on mythology and ritual and thus gained depth and scope. He has combined the pity for and irony of the soldier that we see in Owen with the distanced, more elaborately illustrated, less immediately personal style of Eliot's long poem. And like Eliot, he introduces notes to help the reader follow the mythological and literary references. Unique among the soldier poets, Jones combines the immediacy of war poetry with high modernism's strategies of formal discontinuity and rich allusiveness. The poem conveys the texture of war experience through comic or sardonic references to popular soldiers' songs, to follies and vices and vanities and every kind of trivial behavior. At the same time the poem is multilayered and densely textured, its complex allusions to history, ritual, and heroic myth infusing the characters and the war with mysterious meaning.

The extracts printed here are, first, from Jones's preface, in which he explains his intention and method, and, second, from part 7, describing events during and after the attack. At the beginning of the last section quoted, Ball is wounded and crawling toward the rear through the mingled bodies of British and German soldiers. In his fevered imagination he sees the Queen of the Woods distributing flowers to the dead. He wonders whether he can continue carrying his rifle, which he finally leaves under an oak tree. (At the end of the medieval French epic *Chanson de Roland* [*Song of Roland*], the dying Roland tries in vain to shatter his sword, Durendal, to prevent its being taken as a trophy by the Saracens; he finally puts it under his body.) In the end Ball lies still under the oak beside a dead German and a dead Englishman, hearing the reserves coming forward to continue the battle.

From In Parenthesis

From *Preface*

This writing has to do with some things I saw, felt, & was part of. The period covered begins early in December 1915 and ends early in July 1916. The first date corresponds to my going to France. The latter roughly marks a change in the character of our lives in the Infantry on the West Front. From then onward things hardened into a more relentless, mechanical affair, took on a more sinister aspect. The wholesale slaughter of the later years, the conscripted levies filling the gaps in every file of four, knocked the bottom out of the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men, within whose structure Roland could find, and, for a reasonable while, enjoy, his Oliver.¹ In the earlier months there was a certain attractive amateurishness, and elbowroom for idiosyncrasy that connected one with a less exacting past. The period of the individual rifle-man, of the "old sweat" of the Boer campaign, the "Bairns-father"² war, seemed to terminate with the Somme battle. There were, of course, glimpses of it long after—all through in fact—but it seemed never quite the same. * * *

My companions in the war were mostly Londoners with an admixture of Welshmen, so that the mind and folk-life of those two differing racial groups are an essential ingredient to my theme. Nothing could be more representative. These came from London. Those from Wales. Together they bore in their bodies the genuine tradition of the Island of Britain, from Bendigeid Vran to Jingle and Marie Lloyd. These were the children of Doll Tearsheet. Those are before Caractacus³ was. Both speak in parables, the wit of both is quick, both are natural poets; yet no two groups could well be more dissimilar. It was curious to know them harnessed together, and together caught in the toils of "good order and military discipline"; to see them shape together to the remains of an antique regimental tradition, to see them react to the few things that united us—the same jargon, the same prejudice against "other arms" and against the Staff, the same discomforts, the same grievances, the same

maims, the same deep fears, the same pathetic jokes; to watch them, oneself part of them, respond to the war landscape; for I think the day by day in the Waste Land, the sudden violences and the long stillnesses, the sharp contours and unformed voids of that mysterious existence, profoundly affected the imaginations of those who suffered it. It was a place of enchantment. It is perhaps best described in Malory,⁴ book iv, [chapter 15](#)—that landscape spoke “with a grimly voice.”

I suppose at no time did one so much live with a consciousness of the past, the very remote, and the more immediate and trivial past, both superficially and more subtly. No one, I suppose, however much not given to association, could see infantry in tin-hats, with ground-sheets over their shoulders, with sharpened pine-stakes in their hands, and not recall

. . . or may we cram,
Within this wooden O . . . ⁵

But there were deeper complexities of sight and sound to make ever present

the pibble pabble in Pompey’s camp.⁶

Every man’s speech and habit of mind were a perpetual showing: now of Napier’s expedition, now of the Legions at the Wall, now of “train-band captain,” now of Jack Cade, of John Ball, of the commons in arms. Now of *High Germany*, of *Dolly Gray*, of Bullcalf, Wart and Poins; of Jingo largenesses, of things as small as the Kingdom of Elmet; of Wellington’s raw shire recruits, of ancient border antipathies, of our contemporary, less intimate, larger unities, of *John Barleycorn*, of “sweet Sally Frampton.” Now of Coel Hên—of the Celtic cycle that lies, a subterranean influence as a deep water troubling, under every tump⁷ in this Island, like Merlin⁸ complaining under his big rock.⁹

* * *

This writing is called *In Parenthesis* because I have written it in a kind of space between—I don't know between quite what—but as you turn aside to do something; and because for us amateur soldiers (and especially for the writer, who was not only amateur, but grotesquely incompetent, a knocker-over of piles, a parade's despair) the war itself was a parenthesis—how glad we thought we were to step outside its brackets at the end of '18—and also because our curious type of existence here is altogether in parenthesis.

D. J.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Roland's close friend and companion-at-arms in the medieval French epic *Chanson de Roland* (*Song of Roland*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bruce Bairnsfather (1888–1959), English cartoonist and journalist, best known for his sketches of life in the trenches during World War I.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:
Caractacus or Caradoc, king of the Silures in the west of Britain during the reign of Roman emperor Claudius. He was taken to Rome as a prisoner in 51 c.e., but was pardoned by Claudius, who was impressed by his nobility of spirit. Bendigeid Vran, hero in Welsh heroic legend. Alfred Jingle, character in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. Marie Lloyd (real name Matilda Alice Victoria Wood), English music-hall comedienne. Doll Tearsheet, prostitute in Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV*.
[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Sir Thomas Malory, author of *Morte Darthur*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Shakespeare's *Henry V*, prologue, lines 12–13. The "wooden O" is the stage of the theater.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See *Henry V* 4.1.71.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Mound or tumulus.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The powerful enchanter of the Arthurian legends.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:

The mass of references here provide a wide area of historical and literary association, beginning with *Henry V* and going on to refer to Sir William Napier, who fought in the Peninsular War and later wrote a famous history of that campaign; to the Roman legions who manned the Great Wall built by the Romans in Britain; to Jack Cade, who led an unsuccessful popular revolt against the misrule of Henry VI in 1450, and John Ball, a leader of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381; to a number of English ballads and popular songs and to characters in *Henry IV*; to the ancient British kingdom of Elmet in southwest Yorkshire, finally overthrown by Anglo-Saxon invaders early in the 7th century; to Wellington's "raw shire recruits," who helped win the Battle of Waterloo; and concluding with a reference to the old Celtic British myths that lie beneath everything.

[Return to reference 9](#)

From *Part 7: The Five Unmistakable Marks*¹

Gododdin I demand thy support.
It is our duty to sing: a meeting
place has been found.²

* * *

The gentle slopes are green to remind you
of South English places, only far wider and flatter spread and
grooved and
harrowed criss-cross whitely and the disturbed subsoil heaped up
albescent.³

Across upon this undulated board of verdure⁴ chequered bright
when you look to left and right
small, drab, bundled pawns severally make effort
moved in tenuous line
and if you looked behind—the next wave came slowly, as successive
surfs creep
in to dissipate on flat shore;
and to your front, stretched long laterally,
and receded deeply,
the dark wood.

And now the gradient runs more flatly toward the separate scarred
saplings,
where they make fringe for the interior thicket and you take notice.
There between the thinning uprights
at the margin
straggle tangled oak and flayed sheeny beech-bole, and fragile birch
whose silver queenery is draggled and ungraced
and June shoots lopt
and fresh stalks bled
runs the Jerry⁵ trench.

And cork-screw stapled trip-wire
to snare among the briars
and iron warp with bramble weft⁶
with meadow-sweet and lady-smock
for a fair camouflage.

Mr Jenkins half inclined his head to them—he walked just barely in advance of his platoon and immediately to the left of Private Ball.

He makes the conventional sign
and there is the deeply inward effort of spent men who would make
response

for him,
and take it at the double.
He sinks on one knee
and now on the other,
his upper body tilts in rigid inclination
this way and back;
weighted lanyard^Z runs out to full tether,
 swings like a pendulum
 and the clock run down.

Lurched over, jerked iron saucer over tilted brow,
clampt unkindly over lip and chin
nor no ventaille⁸ to this darkening
 and masked face lifts to grope the air
and so disconsolate;
enfeebled fingering at a paltry strap—
buckle holds,
holds him blind against the morning.

Then stretch still where weeds pattern the chalk predella⁹—
where it rises to his wire¹—and Sergeant T. Quilter takes over.

* * *

It's difficult with the weight of the rifle.
Leave it—under the oak.
Leave it for a salvage-bloke²
let it lie bruised for a monument
dispense the authenticated fragments to the faithful.
It's the thunder-besom for us
it's the bright bough borne
it's the tensioned yew for a Genoese jammed arbalest³ and a scarlet
square for a mounted *mareschal*,⁴ it's that county-mob back to
back.⁵ Majuba mountain and Mons Cherubim⁶ and spreaded mats
for Sydney Street East,⁷ and come to Bisley for a Silver Dish.⁸ It's
R.S.M. O'Grady⁹ says, it's the soldier's best friend if you care for the
working parts and let us be 'aving those springs released smartly in
Company billets on wet forenoons and clickerty-click and one up the
spout and you men must really cultivate the habit of treating this
weapon with the very greatest care and there should be a healthy
rivalry among you—it should be a matter of very proper pride and
Marry it man! Marry it!
Cherish her, she's your very own.
Coax it man coax it—it's delicately and ingeniously made—it's an
instrument of precision—it costs us tax-payers, money—I want you
men to remember that.
Fondle it like a granny—talk to it—consider it as you would a
friend—and when you ground these arms she's not a rooky's gas-
pipe for greenhorns to tarnish.¹
You've known her hot and cold.
You would choose her from among many.
You know her by her bias, and by her exact error at 300, and by the
deep scar at the small, by the fair flaw in the grain, above the lower
sling-swivel—
but leave it under the oak.

* * *

The secret princes between the leaning trees have diadems given them.

Life the leveller hugs her impudent equality—she may proceed at once to less discriminating zones.

The Queen of the Woods has cut bright boughs of various flowering.

These knew her influential eyes. Her awarding hands can pluck for each their fragile prize.

She speaks to them according to precedence. She knows what's due to this elect society. She can choose twelve gentle-men. She knows who is most lord between the high trees and on the open down.

Some she gives white berries
some she gives brown
Emil has a curious crown it's
made of golden saxifrage.

Fatty wears sweet-briar,
he will reign with her for a thousand years.

For Balder she reaches high to fetch his.

Ulrich smiles for his myrtle wand.

That swine Lillywhite has daisies to his chain—you'd hardly credit it.

She plaits torques² of equal splendour for Mr Jenkins and Billy Crower.

Hansel with Gronwy share dog-violets for a palm, where they lie in serious embrace beneath the twisted tripod.

Siôn gets St John's Wort—that's fair enough.

Dai Great-coat,³ she can't find him anywhere—she calls both high and low, she had a very special one for him.

Among this July noblesse she is mindful of December wood—when the trees of the forest beat against each other because of him.

She carries to Aneirin-in-the-nullah⁴ a rowan⁵ sprig, or the glory of Guenedota.⁶ You couldn't hear what she said to him, because she was careful for the Disciplines of the Wars.

At the gate of the wood you try a last adjustment, but slung so, it's an impediment, it's of detriment to your hopes, you had best be rid of it—the sagging webbing and all and what's left of your two fifty⁷—but it were wise to hold on to your mask.

You're clumsy in your feebleness, you implicate your tin-hat rim with the slack sling of it.

Let it lie for the dewes to rust it, or ought you to decently cover the working parts.

Its dark barrel, where you leave it under the oak, reflects the solemn star that rises urgently from Cliff Trench.

It's a beautiful doll for us
it's the Last Reputable Arm.

But leave it—under the oak.
leave it for a Cook's tourist to the Devastated Areas and crawl as far as you can and wait for the bearers.⁸

1937

Endnotes

- Note 1: Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark*, Fit the 2nd verse 15 [*Jones's note*]. Lewis Carroll's mock-heroic nonsense poem concerns the hunting of the elusive animal Snark, which may be known by "five unmistakable marks." A reference to the five wounds of the crucified Christ may also be intended.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
From *Y Gododdin*, early Welsh epical poem attributed to Aneirin (6th century); commemorates raid of 300 Welsh of Gododdin (the territory of the Otadini located near the Firth of Forth) into English kingdom of Deira. Describes the ruin of this 300 in battle at Catraeth (perhaps Catterick in Yorkshire). Three men alone escaped death, including the poet, who laments his friends [*Jones's note*].

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Becoming white.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Green vegetation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: German (British army slang in both world wars).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Warp and weft are the horizontal and vertical threads of woven cloth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Short cord (here “weighted” by a whistle).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Hinged visor of a helmet.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A platform or shelf below or behind an altar.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The approach to the German trenches here rose slightly, in low chalk ridges [*Jones’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Man (slang).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A powerful medieval crossbow.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Marshal (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Gloucestershire Regiment, during an action near Alexandria, in 1801, about-turned their rear rank and engaged the enemy back to back [*Jones’s note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The British were defeated by the Boers on Majuba Hill on February 27, 1881. The “Angels of Mons” were angels (varying in number from two to a platoon) widely believed to have helped the British repel an attack at Mons by superior German forces on August 23, 1914.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In what became known as the Siege or Battle of Sydney Street, Winston Churchill, when he was home secretary in 1911, directed military operations in London against a group of anarchists. “It is said that in ‘The Battle of Sydney Street’ under Mr. Churchill’s Home Secretaryship mats were spread on the pavement for troops firing from the prone position” [*Jones’s note*].[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: At Bisley marksmen compete annually in rifle shooting for trophies such as “a Silver Dish.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “R.S.M.”: regimental sergeant major. “R.S.M. O’Grady;” according to Jones’s note, “refers to mythological personage

figuring in Army exercises, the precise describing of which would be tedious. Anyway these exercises were supposed to foster alertness in dull minds—and were a curious blend of the parlour game and military drill.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: I have employed here only such ideas as were common to the form of speech affected by Instructors in Musketry [*Jones’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Collars, like those of gold worn by warriors of Y *Gododdin*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Character whose first name is the familiar Welsh form of David, alluding to a figure in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A river, stream, or riverbed.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Also called mountain ash, a tree with magical properties in Celtic folklore.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:
The northwest parts of Wales. The last king of Wales, Llywelyn, was killed there in 1282. Jones refers to his death in another note on this part of Wales. He adds: “His [Llywelyn’s] contemporary, Gruffydd ap yr Ynad Côch, sang of his death: ‘The voice of lamentation is heard in everyplace . . . the course of nature is changed . . . the trees of the forest furiously rush against each other.’ ”
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:
This may appear to be an anachronism, but I remember in 1917 discussing with a friend the possibilities of tourist activity if peace ever came. I remember we went into details and wondered if the unexploded projectile lying near us would go up under a holiday-maker, and how people would stand up to be photographed on our parapets. I recall feeling very angry about this, as you do if you think of strangers ever occupying a house you live in, and which has, for you, particular associations [*Jones’s note*].

[Return to reference 8](#)

Modernist Manifestos

At the beginning of the twentieth century, traditions and boundaries of many kinds were under assault across the Western world. Rapid developments in science and technology were transforming the texture of everyday life and conceptions of the universe; psychology, anthropology, and philosophy were challenging old ways of conceiving the human mind and religion; empire, migration, and city life were forcing together peoples of diverse origins. This dizzying pace of change, this break with tradition, this eruption of modernity can also be seen in the cutting-edge art and literature of the time. Avant-garde modernism caught fire in Europe in the decade before World War I. The Spanish expatriate artist Pablo Picasso's landmark cubist painting of 1907, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (see the color insert), shattered centuries of artistic convention. Two years later the Italian poet F. T. Marinetti published his first futurist manifesto in the French journal *Le Figaro*, blasting the dead weight of "museums, libraries, and academies" while glorifying "the beauty of speed." Written from 1911 to 1913, the Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) marked such a daring departure from harmonic and rhythmic traditions in Western classical music that its first performance, in Paris, sparked a riot. Like Picasso, Marinetti, and Stravinsky, other avant-garde modernists—advocates of radical newness in the arts—exploded conventions in music, painting, fiction, poetry, and other genres, opening up new formal and thematic possibilities for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In just a few years modernism's rebellious energies and convention-defying activities swept through the major European cities, from Moscow and Milan to Munich, Paris, and London. Some of the leading modernists published manifestos, public declarations explaining, justifying, and promoting their ambitions and revolutionary views. They were not the first artists to adapt the

manifesto from the political sphere, but they used manifestos widely and vociferously, trumpeting iconoclastic ideas in terms that were meant not only to rally but also, in some cases, to shock. These documents were so influential that they have become an integral part of the history of modernism.

London, where the startling impact of cubism and futurism was felt almost immediately, became a central site in the formation of anglophone modernism. London's publishing opportunities and literary ferment attracted an array of visiting and expatriate writers. The American poet Ezra Pound arrived there in 1908, at twenty-three, and soon ignited London's literary avant-garde, his apartment in Kensington a magnet for like-minded innovators. He befriended the English philosopher-poet T. E. Hulme, who led an avant-garde literary group. Like the cubists and futurists, these modernists advocated a radical break with artistic convention. In lectures Hulme influentially denounced Romanticism as so much moaning and whining, and proposed a "hard, dry" literature in its stead—a notion Pound echoed in his call for "harder and saner" verse, "like granite." After T. S. Eliot came to England in 1914, astonishing Pound by his having "modernized himself *on his own*," Eliot also composed essays marked by Hulme's influence. Aggressively asserting new form and subject matter while holding up the standard of classic texts, the modernists repudiated what they saw as the slushy, self-indulgent literature of the nineteenth century—"blurry, messy," and "sentimentalistic," in Pound's words. This desire to break decisively with Romanticism and Victorianism—often realized more in theory than in practice—became a recurrent feature in their public declarations. The 1914 manifesto of the journal *Blast* thunders, "**BLAST** / years **1837** to **1900**": like other avant-garde statements of intentions, this one damns the middle class for perpetuating Victorian taste and conventional moral attitudes.



Newcastle, 1914, by Edward Wadsworth. This work appeared as an illustration in the first issue of the journal *Blast*. The vorticist fascination with machines and abstraction, influenced by the Italian futurists, is seen in this woodcut, named after the English industrial city.

The agitations, declarations, and poetic experiments of Hulme, Pound, and others resulted in the formation of imagism. Leaders of this London-born movement advocated clear and immediate images, exact and efficient diction, inventive and musical rhythms. The imagist poem was to be brief and stripped down, presenting an image in as few words as possible without commenting on it. In his lecture "Romanticism and Classicism" Hulme said the poet must render "the exact curve of what he sees whether it be an object or an idea in the mind." Having arranged for the nascent movement to be announced by the English poet and critic F. S. Flint in a brief article/interview entitled "Imagisme" (spelled in the French manner), Pound demanded, through Flint's introductory synopsis of imagism's precepts, "Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective." The principles of imagism and Pound's further recommendations in "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" had a profound transatlantic influence long after the movement had petered out.

The American poet H.D. (then called Hilda Doolittle) arrived in London in 1911, just in time to become a major figure in the imagist movement. Her poems, written under the influence of ancient Greek lyrical fragments, so impressed Pound that he sent them, signed "H.D. Imagiste" at his insistence, to Harriet Monroe, the founding editor of *Poetry*, a Chicago clearinghouse for modern verse. He told Monroe that H.D.'s poems were "modern" and "laconic," though classical in subject: "Objective—no slither; direct—no excessive use of adjectives, no metaphors that won't permit examination. It's straight talk, straight as the Greek!" Eventually H.D. and Pound wrote ambitious long poems that broke the mold of the imagist lyric, but even in their more capacious work, imagist compression, immediacy, and juxtaposition remained generative principles.

As early as 1914 Pound was tiring of imagism as static and insufficiently rigorous. Together with the London-based English painter and writer Wyndham Lewis, he helped found a new modernist movement in the arts, vorticism, which emphasized dynamism of content. Pound conceived the vortex—an image of whirling, intensifying, encompassing energy—as the movement's emblem. Like imagism, vorticism lasted for only a few years. Its most

raucous embodiment was the 1914 vorticist manifesto in Wyndham Lewis's journal *Blast*, and its main aesthetic achievements were Lewis's paintings and the London-based French artist Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's sculptures.

The *Blast* manifesto is clearly influenced by Continental modernism, most visibly Italian futurism in the experimental layout and the fire-breathing rhetoric of destruction: the vorticists blast conventions, dull people, and middle-class attitudes. The English-born poet Mina Loy became closely involved with the leaders of the futurist movement, including Marinetti, while in Florence from 1906 to 1916. She was excited by futurism's embrace of modernity and its violent rebuke of tradition, but her typographically experimental "Feminist Manifesto" and her sexually defiant poetry also mark a break with the movement's misogyny and jingoism. Marinetti, Pound, and Lewis—despite their progressive prewar views on many social and artistic matters—later embraced fascism, believing it would help advance their cultural ideals.

Modernist manifestos take on a variety of different forms. Some are individual statements, such as Hulme's lecture "Romanticism and Classicism." Others are meant to be declarations on behalf of an emergent group or movement, such as "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" or the *Blast* manifesto. Occasionally, and paradoxically, a manifesto is a nonpublic declaration, unpublished in the author's lifetime, as in the case of Loy's "Feminist Manifesto." Although the manifesto is not an art form in the same sense as a poem or painting is, manifestos became an important literary genre in the modernist era, and some are more than mere declarations of doctrine. The vorticist manifesto and Loy's "Feminist Manifesto," for example, cross poetry with poster art, creatively manipulating words on the page for maximum effect. In their jagged typography, wild energy, and radical individualism turned to a collective purpose, these modernist manifestos helped advance and now exemplify elements of innovative art through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

T. E. HULME

Although he published only six poems during his brief life, T. E. Hulme (1883–1917), English poet, philosopher, and critic, was one of the strongest intellectual forces behind the development of modernism. In this essay, probably composed in either 1911 or 1912 and probably delivered as a lecture in 1912, Hulme prophesies a “dry, hard, classical verse” that exhibits precision, clarity, and freshness. He sharply repudiates the “spilt religion” of Romanticism, responsible for vagueness in the arts. Hulme sees human beings as limited and capable of improvement only through the influence of tradition. These ideas were an important influence on the thought and poetry of T. S. Eliot. Hulme’s views of conventional language, the visual image, and verbal exactitude also shaped the imagism and vorticism of Ezra Pound and others.

Hulme was born in Staffordshire, England, and attended St. John’s College, Cambridge, from which he was expelled for rebellious behavior in 1904 without finishing his degree. He lived mainly in London, where, befriending Pound and other poets and artists, he became a central figure of the prewar avant-garde. A critic of pacifism, Hulme enlisted as a private in the army when World War I broke out in 1914, and was killed in battle in 1917. First published posthumously in *Speculations* (1924), this essay is excerpted from *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme* (1994), ed. Karen Csengeri.

From Romanticism and Classicism

I want to maintain that after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival, and that the particular weapon of this new classical spirit, when it works in verse, will be fancy. * * *

I know that in using the words 'classic' and 'romantic' I am doing a dangerous thing. They represent five or six different kinds of antitheses, and while I may be using them in one sense you may be interpreting them in another. In this present connection I am using them in a perfectly precise and limited sense. I ought really to have coined a couple of new words, but I prefer to use the ones I have used, as I then conform to the practice of the group of polemical writers who make most use of them at the present day, and have almost succeeded in making them political catchwords. I mean Maurras, Lasserre and all the group connected with *l'Action Française*.¹

At the present time this is the particular group with which the distinction is most vital. Because it has become a party symbol. If you asked a man of a certain set whether he preferred the classics or the romantics, you could deduce from that what his politics were.

The best way of gliding into a proper definition of my terms would be to start with a set of people who are prepared to fight about it—for in them you will have no vagueness. (Other people take the infamous attitude of the person with catholic tastes who says he likes both.)

About a year ago, a man whose name I think was Fauchois gave a lecture at the Odéon on Racine,² in the course of which he made some disparaging remarks about his dullness, lack of invention and the rest of it. This caused an immediate riot: fights took place all over the house; several people were arrested and imprisoned, and the rest of the series of lectures took place with hundreds of gendarmes³ and detectives scattered all over the place. These

people interrupted because the classical ideal is a living thing to them and Racine is the great classic. That is what I call a real vital interest in literature. They regard romanticism as an awful disease from which France had just recovered.

The thing is complicated in their case by the fact that it was romanticism that made the revolution.⁴ They hate the revolution, so they hate romanticism.

I make no apology for dragging in politics here; romanticism both in England and France is associated with certain political views, and it is in taking a concrete example of the working out of a principle in action that you can get its best definition.

What was the positive principle behind all the other principles of '89? I am talking here of the revolution in as far as it was an idea; I leave out material causes—they only produce the forces. The barriers which could easily have resisted or guided these forces had been previously rotted away by ideas. This always seems to be the case in successful changes; the privileged class is beaten only when it has lost faith in itself, when it has itself been penetrated with the ideas which are working against it.

It was not the rights of man—that was a good solid practical war-cry. The thing which created enthusiasm, which made the revolution practically a new religion, was something more positive than that. People of all classes, people who stood to lose by it, were in a positive ferment about the idea of liberty. There must have been some idea which enabled them to think that something positive could come out of so essentially negative a thing. There was, and here I get my definition of romanticism. They had been taught by Rousseau⁵ that man was by nature good, that it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. Remove all these and the infinite possibilities of man would have a chance. This is what made them think that something positive could come out of disorder, this is what created the religious enthusiasm. Here is the root of all romanticism: that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction

of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress.

One can define the classical quite clearly as the exact opposite to this. Man is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him.

* * *

Put shortly, these are the two views, then. One, that man is intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstance; and the other that he is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent. To the one party man's nature is like a well, to the other like a bucket. The view which regards man as a well, a reservoir full of possibilities, I call the romantic; the one which regards him as a very finite and fixed creature, I call the classical.

One may note here that the Church has always taken the classical view since the defeat of the Pelagian heresy⁶ and the adoption of the sane classical dogma of original sin.

It would be a mistake to identify the classical view with that of materialism. On the contrary it is absolutely identical with the normal religious attitude. I should put it in this way: That part of the fixed nature of man is the belief in the Deity. This should be as fixed and true for every man as belief in the existence of matter and in the objective world. It is parallel to appetite, the instinct of sex, and all the other fixed qualities. Now at certain times, by the use of either force or rhetoric, these instincts have been suppressed—in Florence under Savonarola, in Geneva under Calvin, and here under the Roundheads.⁷ The inevitable result of such a process is that the repressed instinct bursts out in some abnormal direction. So with religion. By the perverted rhetoric of Rationalism, your natural instincts are suppressed and you are converted into an agnostic. Just as in the case of the other instincts, Nature has her revenge. The instincts that find their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some other way. You don't believe in a God, so you begin to

believe that man is a god. You don't believe in Heaven, so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words, you get romanticism. The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are spread over, and so mess up, falsify and blur the clear outlines of human experience. It is like pouring a pot of treacle⁸ over the dinner table. Romanticism then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion.

I must now shirk the difficulty of saying exactly what I mean by romantic and classical in verse. I can only say that it means the result of these two attitudes towards the cosmos, towards man, in so far as it gets reflected in verse. The romantic, because he thinks man infinite, must always be talking about the infinite; and as there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man actually can, it always tends, in its later stages at any rate, to be gloomy. I really can't go any further than to say it is the reflection of these two temperaments, and point out examples of the different spirits. On the one hand I would take such diverse people as Horace, most of the Elizabethans and the writers of the Augustan age, and on the other side Lamartine, Hugo, parts of Keats, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Swinburne.⁹

* * *

What I mean by classical in verse, then, is this. That even in the most imaginative flights there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas.

You might say if you wished that the whole of the romantic attitude seems to crystallise in verse round metaphors of flight. Hugo is always flying, flying over abysses, flying up into the eternal gases. The word infinite in every other line.

In the classical attitude you never seem to swing right along to the infinite nothing. If you say an extravagant thing which does

exceed the limits inside which you know man to be fastened, yet there is always conveyed in some way at the end an impression of yourself standing outside it, and not quite believing it, or consciously putting it forward as a flourish. You never go blindly into an atmosphere more than the truth, an atmosphere too rarefied for man to breathe for long. You are always faithful to the conception of a limit. It is a question of pitch; in romantic verse you move at a certain pitch of rhetoric which you know, man being what he is, to be a little high-falutin. The kind of thing you get in Hugo or Swinburne. In the coming classical reaction that will feel just wrong.

* * *

I object even to the best of the romantics. I object still more to the receptive attitude.¹ I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other. I always think in this connection of the last line of a poem of John Webster's which ends with a request I cordially endorse:

'End your moan and come away.'²

The thing has got so bad now that a poem which is all dry and hard, a properly classical poem, would not be considered poetry at all. How many people now can lay their hands on their hearts and say they like either Horace or Pope? They feel a kind of chill when they read them.

The dry hardness which you get in the classics is absolutely repugnant to them. Poetry that isn't damp isn't poetry at all. They cannot see that accurate description is a legitimate object of verse. Verse to them always means a bringing in of some of the emotions that are grouped round the word infinite.

The essence of poetry to most people is that it must lead them to a beyond of some kind. Verse strictly confined to the earthly and the definite (Keats is full of it) might seem to them to be excellent writing, excellent craftsmanship, but not poetry. So much has

romanticism debauched us, that, without some form of vagueness, we deny the highest.

In the classic it is always the light of ordinary day, never the light that never was on land or sea. It is always perfectly human and never exaggerated: man is always man and never a god.

But the awful result of romanticism is that, accustomed to this strange light, you can never live without it. Its effect on you is that of a drug.

* * *

It is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things.

The great aim is accurate, precise and definite description. The first thing is to recognise how extraordinarily difficult this is. It is no mere matter of carefulness; you have to use language, and language is by its very nature a communal thing; that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a compromise—that which is common to you, me and everybody. But each man sees a little differently, and to get out clearly and exactly what he does see, he must have a terrific struggle with language, whether it be with words or the technique of other arts. Language has its own special nature, its own conventions and communal ideas. It is only by a concentrated effort of the mind that you can hold it fixed to your own purpose. I always think that the fundamental process at the back of all the arts might be represented by the following metaphor. You know what I call architect's curves—flat pieces of wood with all different kinds of curvature. By a suitable selection from these you can draw approximately any curve you like. The artist I take to be the man who simply can't bear the idea of that 'approximately'. He will get the exact curve of what he sees whether it be an object or an idea in the mind. I shall here have to change my metaphor a little to get the process in his mind. Suppose that instead of your curved pieces of wood you have a springy piece of steel of the same types of curvature as the wood. Now the state of tension or concentration of mind, if he is doing anything really good in this struggle against the

ingrained habit of the technique, may be represented by a man employing all his fingers to bend the steel out of its own curve and into the exact curve which you want. Something different to what it would assume naturally.

* * *

This is the point I aim at, then, in my argument. I prophesy that a period of dry, hard, classical verse is coming. I have met the preliminary objection founded on the bad romantic aesthetic that in such verse, from which the infinite is excluded, you cannot have the essence of poetry at all.

* * *

Poetry * * * is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. A poet says a ship 'coursed the seas' to get a physical image, instead of the counter word 'sailed'. Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language. Verse is a pedestrian taking you over the ground, prose—a train which delivers you at a destination.

* * *

The point is that exactly the same activity is at work as in the highest verse. That is the avoidance of conventional language in order to get the exact curve of the thing.

* * *

A powerfully imaginative mind seizes and combines at the same instant all the important ideas of its poem or picture, and while it works with one of them, it is at the same instant working with and modifying all in their relation to it and never losing sight of their bearings on each other—as the motion of a snake’s body goes through all parts at once and its volition acts at the same instant in coils which go contrary ways.

A romantic movement must have an end of the very nature of the thing. It may be deplored, but it can’t be helped—wonder must cease to be wonder.

I guard myself here from all the consequences of the analogy, but it expresses at any rate the inevitableness of the process. A literature of wonder must have an end as inevitably as a strange land loses its strangeness when one lives in it. Think of the lost ecstasy of the Elizabethans. ‘Oh my America, my new found land,’³ think of what it meant to them and of what it means to us. Wonder can only be the attitude of a man passing from one stage to another, it can never be a permanently fixed thing.

1911–121924

Endnotes

- Note 1: Charles Maurras (1868–1952) and Pierre Lasserre (1867–1930) were intellectuals associated with *l’Action Française*, a reactionary political movement that denigrated Romanticism and supported the Catholic Church as a force for order. (T. S. Eliot also fell under the movement’s influence.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jean Racine (1639–1699), French tragic playwright associated with classicism. The riot occurred at a lecture delivered by French playwright René Fauchois (1882–1962) at the Odéon Theater, Paris, on November 3, 1910.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Police officers (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The French Revolution (1789–99).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Swiss-born French writer and philosopher whose ideas greatly influenced the leaders of the French Revolution and the development of Romanticism.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Controversial Church doctrine denying the transmission of original sin, named after the theologian Pelagius (ca. 354–after 418).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Puritan members of the Parliamentary Party during the English Civil War (1642–51), named for their short haircuts. Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), Dominican monk who denounced the extravagance of the Renaissance. John Calvin (1509–1564), Protestant theologian who stressed the predestination and the depravity of humankind.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Molasses (British).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:
 Horace (65–8 B.C.E.), Roman poet. “The Elizabethans”: English poets and playwrights (such as Shakespeare) writing during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). “The Augustan age”: the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when English writers such as John Dryden (1631–1700) and Alexander Pope (1688–1744) embraced a classicism likened to the Augustan Age of Rome. Alphonse Lamartine (1790–1869), French poet and politician. Victor Hugo (1802–1885), French poet and novelist. John Keats (1795–1821), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), George Gordon (Lord) Byron (1788–1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), English poets.
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Elsewhere in the essay, Hulme claims that every sort of verse has an accompanying receptive attitude by which readers come to expect certain qualities from poetry. These receptive attitudes, he explains, sometimes outlast the poetry from which they develop.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: From *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623) 4.2, by the English dramatist John Webster (ca. 1580–ca. 1625).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Line 27 of John Donne's "To His Mistress Going to Bed."[Return to reference 3](#)

F. S. FLINT AND EZRA POUND

In the March 1913 issue of *Poetry* magazine, the English poet and translator F. S. Flint published an article summarizing an interview with an unidentified “imagiste”—surely Pound. The article, partly dictated and rewritten by Pound, famously states the three principles of imagism—directness, economy, musical rhythm—which Pound later said he and the poets H.D. and Richard Aldington had agreed on in 1912. Flint’s prefatory piece was followed in the same issue by Pound’s manifesto, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste.” There Pound defines the image and issues injunctions and admonitions to help poets strip their verse of unnecessary rhetoric and abstraction. Poets, he argues, should write direct, musically cadenced, image-grounded verse.

Born in London, F. S. Flint (1885–1960) worked in the British civil service, translated poetry (mostly French), and eventually published volumes of his own imagist poetry. Ezra Pound (1885–1972) was born in Hailey, Idaho, and was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Hamilton College. During his twelve years in London, from 1908 to 1920, where he became closely associated with W. B. Yeats and T. E. Hulme, he was the most vigorous entrepreneur of literary modernism, helping James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and other writers launch their careers. In London he also began producing material for his major work, the massive poem *The Cantos*. Living briefly in Paris and then for twenty years in Italy as an ardent supporter of the fascist regime, he was arrested for treason in 1945, having made Rome Radio broadcasts against the U.S. war effort. He spent twelve years, from 1946 to 1958, in a Washington, D.C., asylum for the criminally insane before returning to Italy, where he fell into an almost complete public silence until the end of his life.

Imagisme¹

Some curiosity has been aroused concerning *Imagisme*, and as I was unable to find anything definite about it in print, I sought out an *imagiste*, with intent to discover whether the group itself knew anything about the "movement." I gleaned these facts.

The *imagistes* admitted that they were contemporaries of the Post Impressionists and the Futurists; but they had nothing in common with these schools. They had not published a manifesto. They were not a revolutionary school; their only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition, as they found it in the best writers of all time,—in Sappho, Catullus, Villon.² They seemed to be absolutely intolerant of all poetry that was not written in such endeavor, ignorance of the best tradition forming no excuse. They had a few rules, drawn up for their own satisfaction only, and they had not published them. They were:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

By these standards they judged all poetry, and found most of it wanting. They held also a certain 'Doctrine of the Image,' which they had not committed to writing; they said that it did not concern the public, and would provoke useless discussion.

The devices whereby they persuaded approaching poetasters to attend their instruction were:

1. They showed him his own thought already splendidly expressed in some classic (and the school musters altogether a most formidable erudition).

2. They re-wrote his verses before his eyes, using about ten words to his fifty.

Even their opponents admit of them—ruefully—“At least they do keep bad poets from writing!”

I found among them an earnestness that is amazing to one accustomed to the usual London air of poetic dilettantism. They consider that Art is all science, all religion, philosophy and metaphysic. It is true that *snobisme* may be urged against them; but it is at least *snobisme* in its most dynamic form, with a great deal of sound sense and energy behind it; and they are stricter with themselves than with any outsider.

F. S. Flint

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In response to many requests for information regarding *Imagism* and the *Imagistes*, we publish this note by Mr. Flint, supplementing it with further exemplification by Mr. Pound. It will be seen from these that *Imagism* is not necessarily associated with Hellenic subjects, or with *vers libre* as a prescribed form [“*Editor’s Note*” from *original*]. “*Vers libre*”: free verse (French).
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: François Villon (1431–after 1463), French poet. Sappho (fl. ca. 610–ca. 580 B.C.E.), Greek poet. Catullus (ca. 84–ca. 54 B.C.E.), Roman poet. [Return to reference 2](#)

A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart,¹ though we might not agree absolutely in our application.

It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

All this, however, some may consider open to debate. The immediate necessity is to tabulate A LIST OF DONT'S for those beginning to write verses. But I can not put all of them into Mosaic negative.²

To begin with, consider the three rules recorded by Mr. Flint, not as dogma—never consider anything as dogma—but as the result of long contemplation, which, even if it is some one else's contemplation, may be worth consideration.

Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves written a notable work. Consider the discrepancies between the actual writing of the Greek poets and dramatists, and the theories of the Graeco-Roman grammarians, concocted to explain their metres.

Language

Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.

Don't use such an expression as "dim lands of *peace*." It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol.

Go in fear of abstractions. Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths.

What the expert is tired of today the public will be tired of tomorrow.

Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher spends on the art of music.

Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it.

Don't allow "influence" to mean merely that you mop up the particular decorative vocabulary of some one or two poets whom you happen to admire. A Turkish war correspondent was recently caught red-handed babbling in his dispatches of "dove-gray" hills, or else it was "pearl-pale," I can not remember.

Use either no ornament or good ornament.

Rhythm and Rhyme

Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadences he can discover, preferably in a foreign language so that the meaning of the words may be less likely to divert his attention from the movement; e.g., Saxon charms, Hebridean Folk Songs, the verse of Dante, and the lyrics of Shakespeare—if he can dissociate the vocabulary from the cadence. Let him dissect the lyrics of Goethe³ coldly into their component sound values, syllables long and short, stressed and unstressed, into vowels and consonants.

It is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert.

Let the neophyte know assonance and alliteration, rhyme immediate and delayed, simple and polyphonic, as a musician would

expect to know harmony and counterpoint and all the minutiae of his craft. No time is too great to give to these matters or to any one of them, even if the artist seldom have need of them.

Don't imagine that a thing will "go" in verse just because it's too dull to go in prose.

Don't be "viewy"—leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays. Don't be descriptive; remember that the painter can describe a landscape much better than you can, and that he has to know a deal more about it.

When Shakespeare talks of the "Dawn in russet mantle clad"⁴ he presents something which the painter does not present. There is in this line of his nothing that one can call description; he presents.

Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap.

The scientist does not expect to be acclaimed as a great scientist until he has *discovered* something. He begins by learning what has been discovered already. He goes from that point onward. He does not bank on being a charming fellow personally. He does not expect his friends to applaud the results of his freshman class work. Freshmen in poetry are unfortunately not confined to a definite and recognizable class room. They are "all over the shop." Is it any wonder "the public is indifferent to poetry?"

Don't chop your stuff into separate *iamb*s. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause.

In short, behave as a musician, a good musician, when dealing with that phase of your art which has exact parallels in music. The same laws govern, and you are bound by no others.

Naturally, your rhythmic structure should not destroy the shape of your words, or their natural sound, or their meaning. It is improbable that, at the start, you will be able to get a rhythm-structure strong enough to affect them very much, though you may fall a victim to all sorts of false stopping due to line ends and caesurae.

The musician can rely on pitch and the volume of the orchestra. You can not. The term harmony is misapplied to poetry; it refers to simultaneous sounds of different pitch. There is, however, in the best verse a sort of residue of sound which remains in the ear of the hearer and acts more or less as an organ-base. A rhyme must have in it some slight element of surprise if it is to give pleasure; it need not be bizarre or curious, but it must be well used if used at all.

Vide further Vildrac and Duhamel's notes on rhyme in "*Technique Poetique*."⁵

That part of your poetry which strikes upon the imaginative eye of the reader will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue; that which appeals to the ear can reach only those who take it in the original.

Consider the definiteness of Dante's presentation, as compared with Milton's rhetoric. Read as much of Wordsworth⁶ as does not seem too unutterably dull.

If you want the gist of the matter go to Sappho, Catullus, Villon, Heine when he is in the vein, Gautier when he is not too frigid; or, if you have not the tongues, seek out the leisurely Chaucer.⁷ Good prose will do you no harm, and there is good discipline to be had by trying to write it.

Translation is likewise good training, if you find that your original matter "wobbles" when you try to rewrite it. The meaning of the poem to be translated can not "wobble."

If you are using a symmetrical form, don't put in what you want to say and then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush.

Don't mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the exact word. To this clause there are possibly exceptions.

The first three simple proscriptions⁸ will throw out nine-tenths of all the bad poetry now accepted as standard and classic; and will prevent you from many a crime of production.

". . . *Mais d'abord il faut etre un poete*,"⁹ as MM. Duhamel and Vildrac have said at the end of their little book, "*Notes sur la*

Technique Poétique"; but in an American one takes that at least for granted, otherwise why does one get born upon that august continent!

Ezra Pound

1913

Endnotes

- Note 1: British psychologist Bernard Hart (1879–1966) discusses “the complex” in *The Psychology of Insanity* (1912), a book that helped popularize psychoanalysis.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reference to the Ten Commandments delivered to Moses (Exodus 20).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), German Romantic poet, playwright, and novelist.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Horatio’s speech in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “But look, the morn in russet mantle clad / Walks o’er the dew of yon high eastern hill” (1.1.147–48).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Charles Vildrac (1882–1971), French poet, playwright, and critic, and Georges Duhamel (1884–1966), French novelist and critic, cowrote *Notes sur la Technique Poétique* (1910). “Vide”: consider (Latin).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: John Milton (1608–1674) and William Wordsworth (1770–1850), English poets.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1342–1400), English poet. Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), German poet. Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), French poet.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Noted by Mr. Flint [*Pound’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: But first it is necessary to be a poet (French).[Return to reference 9](#)

AN IMAGIST CLUSTER: T. E. HULME, EZRA POUND, H.D.

At the inception of imagism in London, its key proponents included the English poet-philosopher Hulme and the expatriate American poets Ezra Pound and H.D. The paths of these three writers were densely interconnected at this juncture. In his poetry volume *Ripostes* (1912), Pound published an appendix of five poems, "The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme," prefaced by a note that printed the term *imagistes* for the first time. That year, in a London teashop, Pound had announced to the English poet Richard Aldington and the American poet H.D. that they were "imagistes," and two years later he included their and his work in the first anthology of such poetry, *Des Imagistes*. Although the movement began in London, with a French-styled name, the American poet Amy Lowell (1874–1925), derided by Pound for watering down its principles, helped disseminate its ideas in the United States, where she publicized and promoted the form in anthologies, lectures, and readings.

In spare, hard-edged poems, the imagists sought to turn verse away from what they saw as the slack sentimentality, fuzzy abstraction, explanatory excess, and metrical predictability of Victorian poetry. Imagism owed a debt to the symbolism of Yeats and nineteenth-century French poets, but it shifted the emphasis from the musical to the visual, the mysterious to the actual, the ambiguously suggestive symbol to the clear-cut natural image. Adherents looked to models from East Asia (haiku for Pound's "In a Station in the Metro") and classical Europe (Greek verse for H.D.'s "Oread"). Their poetry is compressed, achieving a maximum effect with a minimum of words. It is often centered in a single figurative juxtaposition, conjoining tenor and vehicle without explanation. And

it typically relies not on strict meters but on informal rhythms or cadences.

H.D. (1886–1961) was born Hilda Doolittle in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and educated at Bryn Mawr College. In 1911 she went to Europe for what she thought would be a brief visit but became a lifelong stay, mainly in England and in Switzerland. After her initial imagist phase she wrote more expansive works, including the three long, meditative poems that make up *Trilogy* (1973), precipitated by the experience of the London bombings in World War II.

T. E. HULME: Autumn

A touch of cold in the Autumn night—
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
5 I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

1912

EZRA POUND: In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.¹

1913, 1916

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Pound describes this poem's genesis in *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916):
"Three years ago in Paris I got out of a 'metro' train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. And that evening . . . I was still trying and I found, suddenly, the expression. I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation . . . not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. . . . The 'one-image poem' is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it. . . . Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following *hokku*-like sentence."
"Hokku": another term for haiku.

[Return to reference 1](#)

H.D.: Oread¹

Whirl up, sea—
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
5 Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.

1914

Endnotes

- Note 1: Greek nymph of the mountains. [Return to reference 1](#)

H.D.: Sea Rose

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,

5 more precious
than a wet rose,
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.

10 Stunted, with small leaf,
you are flung on the sands,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.

15 Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

1916

BLAST

The journal *Blast* was published only twice—on June 20, 1914, though released on July 2, one month before Great Britain entered World War I, and a year later, during the war that would bring its short life to an end. But its initial preface and two-part manifesto, printed in the first pages of the first number and excerpted below, are among the most important documents in the history of modernism. They rhetorically and typographically embody the violent iconoclasm of vorticism, an avant-garde movement in the literary and visual arts centered in London. The English writer and painter Wyndham Lewis founded and edited *Blast*, whose title, he said, “means the blowing away of dead ideas and worn-out notions” (it also suggests *fire*, *explosion*, and *damn!*). He drafted much of the vorticist manifesto and fashioned its shocking visual design, likening *Blast* to a “battering ram.” Ezra Pound became a vorticist after abandoning imagism, because he felt that the *vortex*, “the point of maximum energy,” offered a more dynamic model for art than the static image of the imagists. The French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891–1915), killed in World War I and memorialized both in the “War Number” of *Blast* and in Pound’s book named for him, was another key vorticist leader. In the pages of *Blast* 1 and 2, artworks by Lewis, Gaudier-Brzeska, and other visual artists appeared alongside writings by Lewis, Pound, T. S. Eliot, and other avant-gardists.

The vorticist manifesto, signed by Lewis, Pound, and Gaudier-Brzeska, among others, reflects the London modernists’ competitive anxiety about European avant-garde movements such as cubism and especially futurism. Under the charismatic leadership of F. T. Marinetti, the futurists celebrated speed, modernization, and the machine, while calling for the destruction of the museums, the libraries, and all such bastions of the past. The vorticists—in lists of things and people to “**BLAST**” and “**BLESS**,” which they compiled at

group meetings—similarly blast convention, standardization, the middle class, even the “years **1837** to **1900**.” And yet despite their cosmopolitan enthusiasms, the vorticists also assert their independence, repeatedly criticizing the futurists. For all their antipathy toward England, they also “**BLESS**” it, revaluing, for example, English mobility (via the sea) and inventiveness (as the engine of the Industrial Revolution).



Cover, *Blast 2*, 1915. The second and final issue of the journal *Blast* featured a woodcut, *Before Antwerp*, by the vorticist artist Wyndham Lewis. Vorticism embraced machine-age modernity, as evident in this woodcut's sharp angles, geometric forms, and

dynamic movement. The mechanistic soldiers tilt forward to suggest their forward march, juxtaposed against abstract urban architecture.

Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) studied for several years at London's Slade School of Art before exploring the avant-garde visual arts in Paris. On returning to London in 1909, he began to write fiction and exhibit his paintings. During World War I he served as an artillery officer and then as a war artist, and afterward he continued to paint and publish essays, poetry, and fiction, including his first novel, *Tarr* (1918). Like Ezra Pound, he alienated many friends when he subsequently supported fascism.

The excerpts below are taken from *Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex*, No. 1 (1914).

Long Live the Vortex!

Long live the great art vortex sprung up in the centre of this town!¹

We stand for the Reality of the Present—not for the sentimental Future, or the sacripant² Past.

We want to leave Nature and Men alone.

We do not want to make people wear Futurist Patches, or fuss men to take to pink and sky-blue trousers.³

We are not their wives or tailors.

The only way Humanity can help artists is to remain independent and work unconsciously.

WE NEED THE UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF HUMANITY— their stupidity, animalism and dreams.

We believe in no perfectibility except our own.

Intrinsic beauty is in the Interpreter and Seer, not in the object or content.

We do not want to change the appearance of the world, because we are not Naturalists, Impressionists or Futurists (the latest form of Impressionism),⁴ and do not depend on the appearance of the world for our art.

WE ONLY WANT THE WORLD TO LIVE , and to feel its crude energy flowing through us.

It may be said that great artists in England are always revolutionary, just as in France any really great artist had a strong traditional vein.

Blast sets out to be an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way.

Blast will be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular

instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL . The moment a man feels or realizes himself as an artist, he ceases to belong to any milieu or time. Blast is created for this timeless, fundamental Artist that exists in everybody.

The Man in the Street and the Gentleman are equally ignored.

Popular art does not mean the art of the poor people, as it is usually supposed to. It means the art of the individuals.

Education (art education and general education) tends to destroy the creative instinct. Therefore it is in times when education has been non-existent that art chiefly flourished.

But it is nothing to do with "the People."

It is a mere accident that that is the most favourable time for the individual to appear.

To make the rich of the community shed their education skin, to destroy politeness, standardization and academic, that is civilized, vision, is the task we have set ourselves.

We want to make in England not a popular art, not a revival of lost folk art, or a romantic fostering of such unactual conditions, but to make individuals, wherever found.

We will convert the King⁵ if possible.

A VORTICIST KING! WHY NOT?

DO YOU THINK LLOYD GEORGE⁶ HAS THE VORTEX IN HIM?

MAY WE HOPE FOR ART FROM LADY MOND?⁷

We are against the glorification of "the People," as we are against snobbery. It is not necessary to be an outcast bohemian, to be unkempt or poor, any more than it is necessary to be rich or handsome, to be an artist. Art is nothing to do with the coat you wear. A top-hat can well hold the Sixtine. A cheap cap could hide the image of Kephren.⁸

AUTOMOBILISM (Marinetteism)⁹ bores us. We don't want to go about making a hullo-bulloo about motor cars, anymore than about knives and forks, elephants or gas-pipes.

Elephants are VERY BIG . Motor cars go quickly.

Wilde gushed twenty years ago about the beauty of machinery. Gissing,¹ in his romantic delight with modern lodging houses was futurist in this sense.

The futurist is a sensational and sentimental mixture of the aesthete of 1890 and the realist of 1870.

The "Poor" are detestable animals! They are only picturesque and amusing for the sentimentalist or the romantic! The "Rich" are bores without a single exception, *en tant que riches!*²

We want those simple and great people found everywhere.

Blast presents an art of Individuals.

Endnotes

- Note 1: London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Boastful of valor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The futurists celebrated the technology, power, and dynamism of the modern age and sought to break with the past and traditional forms.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Naturalism, a late-nineteenth-century school of realism, claimed that all human life was governed by natural laws. Impressionism emphasized the subjectivity of perspective over any inherent quality in a represented object.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: George V ascended the British throne in 1910 and remained the king until 1936.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: David Lloyd George (1863–1945), British politician, prime minister 1916–22.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Wife of wealthy industrialist Sir Robert Mond, and a prominent member of fashionable London society.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Ancient Egyptian pharaoh buried in one of the great pyramids at Giza. "The Sixtine": the Sistine Chapel, in the Vatican.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), Italian writer and founder of futurism, glorified war and technology and invented a "drama of objects" in which human actors play no parts.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:
George Gissing (1837–1903), naturalist English novelist. Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Irish writer and critic; in his 1891 essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism," he writes: "All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. . . . *At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man.*"
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Insofar as they are rich (French).[Return to reference 2](#)

6

BLAST

years **1837** to **1900**¹

Curse **abysmal** **inexcusable** **middle-**
class

(also Aristocracy and Proletariat).

BLAST

pasty shadow cast by gigantic Boehm²

(Imagined at introduction of **BOURGEOIS**
VICTORIAN
VISTAS).

WRING THE NECK OF all sick inventions born in
that progressive white wake.

BLAST their weeping whiskers—hirsute³

RHETORIC of EUNUCH and
STYLIST—

SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS

ROUSSEAUISMS⁴ (wild Nature
cranks)

FRATERNIZING WITH
MONKEYS

DIABOLICS—raptures and roses

of the erotic bookshelves
culminating in
**PURGATORY OF
PUTNEY.**⁵

CHAOS OF ENOCH ARDENS

laughing Jennys
Ladies with Pains
good-for-nothing
Guineveres.⁶

SNOBBISH BORROVIAN running after
GIPSY KINGS and **ESPADAS**⁷

bowing the knee to
wild Mother Nature,
her feminine contours,
Unimaginative insult to
MAN.

DAMN

all those to-day who have taken on that Rotten
Menagerie,
and still crack their whips and tumble in
Piccadilly Circus,
as though London were a provincial town.

**WE WHISPER IN YOUR EAR A GREAT
SECRET.**

**LONDON IS NOT A
PROVINCIAL TOWN.**

**We will allow Wonder Zoos. But we do not want
the**

**GLOOMY VICTORIAN CIRCUS⁸ in
Piccadilly Circus.**

**IT IS PICCADILLY'S
CIRCUS!**

**NOT MEANT FOR MENAGERIES
trundling**

**out of Sixties DICKENSIAN
CLOWNS,**

CORELLI LADY

RIDERS,⁹

TROUPS OF

PERFORMING

**GIPSIES (who complain
besides that 1/6 a night
does not pay fare back to
Clapham).¹**

BLAST²

The Post Office

**Frank Brangwyn
Nicol**

Robertson

**Rev. Pennyfeather
(Bells)**

**Galloway Kyle
(Cluster of Grapes)**

Bishop of London and all his posterity

Galsworthy

Dean Inge

Croce

Matthews

Rev Meyer

Seymour Hicks

Lionel Cust	C. B. Fry	Bergson	Abdul
	Bahai		
Hawtreys	Edward Elgar	Sardlea	
Filson Young	Marie Gorelli	Geddes	
Codliver Oil	St. Loe Strachey	Lyceum Club	
Rhabindraneth Tagore	Lord Glenconner of		
	Glen		
Weiniger Norman Angel	Ad. Mahon		
Mr. and Mrs. Dearmer	Beecham	Ella	
A. C. Benson	(Pills, Opera, Thomas) Sydney Webb		
British Academy	Messrs. Chapell		
Countess of Warwick	George Edwards		
Willie Ferraro	Captain Cook	R. J. Campbell	
Clan Thesiger	Martin Harvey	William Archer	
George Grossmith	R. H. Benson		
Annie Besant	Chenil	Clan Meynell	
Father Vaughan	Joseph Holbrooke	Clan	
	Strachey		

1914

Endnotes

- Note 1: Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901. This sixth list of items in the "BLAST" section comes last, before the "BLESS" section. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joseph Edgar Boehm (1834–1890) sculpted a colossal marble statue of Queen Victoria. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hair. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Swiss-born French philosopher who argued that humans are good and

noble in their natural state, before society and civilization corrupt them.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A middle-class London suburb.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In late medieval romance, King Arthur's queen in Camelot; also, the title character in two narrative poems by the English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892). "Enoch Arden" (1864) is another narrative poem by Tennyson, rejected here for its sentimentalism. Jenny is the title character of another sentimental poem (1870), by the English poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Swords (Spanish). "Borrobian": from George Henry Borrow (1803–1881), English writer of popular gypsy romances, such as *The Zincali: An Account of the Gypsies of Spain* (1843).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: "Circus": here, traveling entertainment act with animals and acrobats; also British traffic circle (for example, Piccadilly Circus in central London). "Wonder Zoos": traveling exhibition of exotic animals.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Marie Corelli, pseudonym of Mary Mackay (1855–1924), best-selling (and royal favorite) English writer of romances and religious novels in which she aimed to reform social ills. "Dickensian clowns": from the novels of English writer Charles Dickens (1812–1870).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Suburban district of London. "1/6": 18d, or a shilling and sixpence, then equivalent to about thirty-five cents.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
Those blasted here range from individuals, such as Charles Burgess Fry, England's star cricket player and a tireless self-promoter, to things mocked seemingly for the thrill of doing so, such as codliver oil. Blasted, too, are institutions or members of the national, literary, or cultural establishment (for example, the post office, a much-lauded model of Victorian efficiency, and the British Academy, established in 1902 by Royal Charter as the national institute for humanities and social sciences), including various clergy and public leaders (for example, bishop of

London; William Ralph Inge, dean of St. Paul's Cathedral; the Reverends Pennyfeather and Meyer; R. J. Campbell, English Congregationalist minister in the City Temple of London, and a Pantheist; Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, archbishop of Westminster and superior of the Catholic Missionary Society; Norman Angell, pacifist British economist; Arthur Christopher Benson, schoolmaster at Eton College, author of Edward VII's coronation ode). Critics unfriendly to the avant-garde are also included (for example, William Archer, drama critic for the *Nation*; Sir William Robertson Nicoll, biblical editor and sometime literary critic; Lionel Cust, director of the National Portrait Gallery and contributor to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, etc.). Also ridiculed are artists and writers whom the vorticists believed were meager talents in spite of their popularity (for example, painter Frank Brangwyn, poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox, actors George Grossmith and Seymour Hicks, composers Joseph Holbrooke and Edward Elgar, etc.), as well as those associated with fads (for example, Sir Abdul Baha Bahai, leader of the Baha'i faith) or idealistic social reform (for example, author Marie Corelli; Sidney Webb, a leader of the Fabian Socialist organization; Annie Besant, theosophist and suffragist). Some names (for example, Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore) are misspelled. For a detailed discussion of the cursing and blessing in *Blast*, see William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (1972).

[Return to reference 2](#)

MINA LOY

Mina Loy (1882–1966) was born in London to a Protestant mother and a Jewish father. She began her artistic career in the visual arts, but she later became an experimental poet, writing lyrics and long poems that created a stir because of their literary, linguistic, and sexual iconoclasm. Among them were the scandalous “Songs to Joannes,” in which she risks de-idealizing and desentimentalizing sex while freeing poetry of conventional diction, syntax, and punctuation. From 1899 to 1916 she lived and worked mostly in Munich, Paris, and especially Florence. She moved to New York in 1916 and to Paris in 1923, then settled in the United States in 1936.

Loy composed this manifesto, which she considered a rough draft and never published, in November 1914 and sent it to her friend Mabel Dodge (1879–1962), American author and celebrated patron of the arts. In the decade before Loy wrote it, feminist activism had intensified in England, particularly the militant civil disobedience of Christabel Pankhurst and other suffragettes in the Women’s Social and Political Union. Loy’s piece, which bears fruitful comparison with the masculine *Blast* manifesto published a few months earlier, was partly the result of Loy’s quarrels with the Italian futurists, with whom she was closely associated despite the movement’s misogyny. In the manifesto Loy tries to harness for feminism the radicalism and individualism of the avant-garde, calling for nothing less than a revolution in gender relations. She abandons the suffragette movement’s central issue of equality and insists instead on an adversarial model of gender, claiming that women should not look to men for a standard of value but should find it within themselves. First published in the posthumous collection *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (1982), the manifesto is reprinted from *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996); both volumes were edited by Roger L. Conover.

Feminist Manifesto

The feminist movement as at present instituted is

Inadequate

Women if you want to realise yourselves—you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illusions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—are you prepared

for the Wrench—? There is no half-measure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about

Reform, the only method is Absolute Demolition

Cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-crusades & uniform education—you are glossing over Reality.

Professional & commercial careers are opening up for you—Is that all you want?

And if you honestly desire to find your level without prejudice—be

Brave & deny at the outset—that pathetic clap-trap war cry

Woman is the equal of man—

for

She is NOT!

The man who lives a life in which his activities conform to a social code which is a protectorate of the feminine element—is no

longer masculine

The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a relative impersonality, are not yet Feminine

Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not—seek within yourselves to find out what you are

As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice between Parasitism, & Prostitution—or Negation

Men & women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited—at present they are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the others sexual dependence—. The only point at which the interests of the sexes merge—is the sexual embrace.

The first illusion it is to your interest to demolish is the division of women into two classes the mistress, & the mother ever well-balanced & developed woman knows that is not true, Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty for expressing herself through all her functions—there are no restrictions the woman who is so incompletely evolved as to be un-self-conscious in sex, will prove a restrictive influence on the temperamental expansion of the next generation; the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother—an inferior mentality —&' will enjoy an inadequate apprehension of Life .

To obtain results you must make sacrifices & the first & greatest sacrifice you have to make is of your "virtue" The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity—is too easy a stand-by—rendering her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value— therefore, the first self- enforced law for the female sex, as a protection against the man made bogey of virtue—which is the principle instrument of her subjection, would be the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population at puberty—.

The value of man is assessed entirely according to his use or interest to the community, the value of woman, depends entirely on chance, her success or insuccess in manoeuvring a man into taking the life-long responsibility of her—

The advantages of marriage of too ridiculously ample—compared to all other trades—for under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man (with-out return of any sort—even offspring)—as a thank offering for her virginity

The woman who has not succeeded in striking that advantageous bargain—is prohibited from any but surreptitious re-action to Life-

stimuli—& entirely debarred maternity.

Every woman has a right to maternity—

Every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex—

Each child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life—& not necessarily of a possibly irksome & outworn continuance of an alliance—spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it—follow their individual lines of personal evolution—

For the harmony of the race, each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpenetration of the male & female temperaments—free of stress

Woman must become more responsible for the child than man—

Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved—

The feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers his attentions from her to another woman

The desire for comfortable protection instead of an intelligent curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressure of life sex or so called love must be reduced to its initial element, honour, grief,

sentimentality, pride & consequently jealousy must be detached from it.

Woman for her happiness must retain her deceptive fragility of appearance, combined with indomitable will, irreducible courage, & abundant health the outcome of sound nerves— Another great illusion that woman must use all her introspective clear-sightedness & unbiassed bravery to destroy—for the sake of her self respect the impurity of sex the realisation in defiance of superstition that there is nothing impure in sex—except in the mental attitude to it—will constitute an incalculable & wider social regeneration than it is possible for our generation to imagine.

19141982

From Songs to Joannes^{[1](#)}

Endnotes

- Note 1: Loy's pseudonym for her difficult lover, the Italian poet Giovanni Papini (1881–1956). [Return to reference 1](#)

I

Spawn of Fantasies
Silted the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting garbage
"Once upon a time"
5 Pulls a weed white star-topped
Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane

I would an eye in a Bengal light²
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
10 Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

These are suspect places

I must live in my lantern
Trimming subliminal flicker
15 Virginal to the bellows
Of Experience Coloured glass

Endnotes

- Note 2: Flare used for signaling or illumination. [Return to reference 2](#)

III

We might have coupled
In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
Or broken flesh with one another
At the profane communion table
Where wine is spill'd on promiscuous lips

5

We might have given birth to a butterfly
With the daily news
Printed in blood on its wings

XIV

Today
Everlasting passing apparent imperceptible
To you
I bring the nascent virginity of
—Myself for the moment

5

No love or the other thing
Only the impact of lighted bodies
Knocking sparks off each other
In chaos

XXVI

Shedding our petty pruderies
From slit eyes

We sidle up
To Nature
— — — that irate pornographer

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

1865–1939

William Butler Yeats was born to an Anglo-Irish family in Dublin. His father, J. B. Yeats, had abandoned law to take up painting, at which he made a somewhat precarious living. His mother came from the Pollexfen family that lived near Sligo, in the west of Ireland, where Yeats spent much of his childhood. The Yeatses moved to London in 1874, then returned to Dublin in 1880. Yeats attended first high school and then art school, which he soon left to concentrate on poetry.

Yeats's father was a religious skeptic, but he believed in the "religion of art." Yeats, religious by temperament but unable to believe in Christian orthodoxy, sought all his life to compensate for his lost religion. This search led him to various kinds of mysticism, to folklore, theosophy, spiritualism, and neoplatonism. He said he "made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition."

Yeats's childhood and young manhood were spent between Dublin, London, and Sligo, and each of these places contributed something to his poetic development. In London in the 1890s he met the important poets of the day, founded the Irish Literary Society, and acquired late-Romantic, Pre-Raphaelite ideas of poetry: he believed, in this early stage of his career, that a poet's language should be dreamy, evocative, and ethereal. From the countryside around Sligo he gained a knowledge of the life of the peasantry and of their folklore. In Dublin, where he founded the National Literary

Society, he was influenced by Irish nationalism and, although often disagreeing with those who wished to use literature for political ends, he nevertheless came to see his poetry as contributing to the rejuvenation of Irish culture.

Yeats's poetry began in the tradition of self-conscious Romanticism, strongly influenced by the English poets Edmund Spenser, Percy Shelley, and, a little later, William Blake, whose works he edited. About the same time, he was writing poems (for example, "The Stolen Child") derived from his Sligo experience, with quietly precise nature imagery, Irish place-names, and themes from Irish folklore. A little later he drew on the great stories of the heroic age of Irish history and translations of Gaelic poetry into "that dialect which gets from Gaelic its syntax and keeps its still partly Tudor vocabulary." The heroic legends of ancient Ireland and the folk traditions of the modern Irish countryside helped brace his early dreamlike imagery. "The Lake Isle of Innisfree"—"my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music," said Yeats—is both a Romantic evocation of escape into dream, art, and the imagination, and a specifically Irish reverie on freedom and self-reliance.

Yeats vigorously hybridizes Irish and English traditions, and eventually draws into this potent intercultural mix East and South Asian cultural resources, including Japanese Noh theater and Indian meditative practices. Resolutely Irish, he imaginatively reclaims a land colonized by the British; imposes Irish rhythms, images, genres, and syntax on English-language poetry; and revives native myths, place-names, and consciousness. Yet he is also cosmopolitan, insisting on the transnationalism of the collective storehouse of images he calls "Spiritus Mundi" or "Anima Mundi," spending much of his life in England, and cross-pollinating forms, ideas, and images from Ireland and England, Europe and Asia.

Irish nationalism first sent Yeats in search of a consistently simpler and more popular style, to express the elemental facts about Irish life and aspirations. This led him to the concrete image, as did translations from Gaelic folk songs, in which "nothing . . . was abstract, nothing worn-out." But other forces were also working on

him. In 1902 a friend gave him the works of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, to which he responded with great excitement, and it would seem that, in persuading the passive love poet to get off his knees, Nietzsche's books intensified his search for a more active stance, a more vigorous style. At the start of the twentieth century, Yeats wearied of his early languid aesthetic, declaring his intentions, in a 1901 letter, to make "everything hard and clear" and, in another of 1904, to leave behind "sentiment and sentimental sadness." He wished for poems that did not reach for disembodied beauty but that could "carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole." In poems of his middle period, such as "Adam's Curse" and "A Coat," Yeats combines the colloquial with the formal, enacting in his more austere diction, casual rhythms, and passionate syntax his will to leave behind the poetic "embroideries" of his youth and walk "naked." The American poet Ezra Pound, who spent winters from 1913 to 1916 with Yeats in a stone cottage in Sussex, strengthened Yeats's resolve to develop a less mannered, more stripped-down style.

In 1889 Yeats had met the beautiful actor and Irish nationalist Maud Gonne, with whom he was desperately in love for many years, but who persistently refused to marry him. She became the subject of many of his early love poems, and in later poems, such as "No Second Troy" and "A Prayer for My Daughter," he expresses anger over her self-sacrifice to political activism. He had also met Augusta, Lady Gregory, an Anglo-Irish writer and promoter of Irish literature, in 1896, and Yeats spent many holidays at her aristocratic country house, Coole Park. Disliking the moneygrubbing and prudery of the middle classes, as indicated in "September 1913," he looked for his ideal characters either below, to peasants and beggars, or above, to the aristocracy, for each of these had their own traditions and lived according to them. Under Lady Gregory's influence, Yeats began to organize the Irish dramatic movement in 1899 and, with her help, founded the Abbey Theatre in 1904. His active participation in theatrical production—confronting political censorship, economic problems of paying carpenters and actors, and other aspects of "theatre business, management of men"—also helped toughen his

style, as he demonstrates in "The Fascination of What's Difficult." Yeats's long-cherished hope had been to "bring the halves together"—Protestant and Catholic—through a literature infused with Ireland's ancient myths and cultural riches before the divisions between rival Christianities. But in a string of national controversies, he ran afoul of both the Roman Catholic middle class and the Anglo-Irish Protestant ascendancy, and at last, bitterly turning his back on Ireland, moved to England.

Then came the Easter Rising of 1916, led by men and women he had long known, some of whom were executed or imprisoned by the British. Persuaded by Gonne (whose estranged husband was one of the executed leaders) that "tragic dignity had returned to Ireland," Yeats returned. His culturally nationalist work had helped inspire the poet revolutionaries, and so he asked himself, as he put it in the late poem "Man and the Echo," did his work "send out / Certain men the English shot?" Yeats's nationalism and antinationalism, his divided loyalties to Ireland and to England, find powerfully ambivalent expression in "Easter, 1916" and other poems. Throughout his poetry he brilliantly mediates between contending aspects of himself—late-Romantic visionary and astringent modern skeptic, Irish patriot and irreverent antinationalist, shrewd man of action and esoteric dreamer. As he said: "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." Conceiving consciousness as conflict, he fashioned a kind of poetry that could embody the contradictory feelings and ideas of his endless inner debate.

THE
TOWER

THE TOWER

BY W.B. YEATS

W.B.
YEATS



MACMILLAN AND CO

DEL

TSM

The Tower. Yeats commissioned the artist Thomas Sturge Moore to create the cover of his collection *The Tower* (1928). He praised Moore's stylized gold and green woodcut design for its visual accuracy and symbolic potency in depicting Thoor Ballylee.

To mark his recommitment to Ireland, Yeats refurbished and renamed Thoor (Castle) Ballylee, the Norman tower on Lady Gregory's land, in which he lived off and on, and which became, along with its inner winding stair, a central symbol in his later poetry. In 1922 he was appointed a senator of the recently established Irish Free State, and he served until 1928, playing an active part not only in promoting the arts but also in mediating general political affairs, in which he supported the views of the minority Protestant landed class. At the same time, he was continuing his esoteric studies. He married Georgie (changed by Yeats to George) Hyde Lees in 1917, when he was fifty-two, and she proved so sympathetic to his imaginative needs that the automatic writing she produced for several years (believed by Yeats to have been dictated by spirits) gave him the elements of a symbolic system that he later worked out in his book *A Vision* (1925, 1937). The system was a theory of the movements of history and of the different types of personality, each movement and type being related to a different phase of the moon. At the center of the symbolic system were the interpenetrating cones, or "gyres," that represented the movement through major cycles of history and across antitheses of human personality.

He compressed and embodied his personal mythology in visionary poems of great scope, linguistic force, and incantatory power, such as "The Second Coming" and "Leda and the Swan." In poems of the 1920s and 1930s, winding stairs, spinning tops, "gyres," spirals of all kinds, are important symbols, serving as a means of resolving some of the contraries that had arrested him from the beginning—paradoxes of time and eternity, change and continuity, spirit and the body, life and art. If his earliest poetry was sometimes static, a beautifully stitched tapestry laden with symbols of inner states, his late poetry became more dynamic, its propulsive syntax and

muscular rhythms more suited to his themes of lust, rage, and the body. He had once screened these out of his verse as unpoetic, along with war, violence, "the mire of human veins." Now he embraced the mortal world intensely. In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the self defies the soul's injunction to leave the world behind: "I am content to live it all again / And yet again, if it be life to pitch / Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch." Yeats no longer sought transcendence of the human, but instead aimed for the active interpenetration of the corporeal and the visionary. In his Nietzsche-inspired poems of "tragic joy," such as "Lapis Lazuli," he affirmed ruin and destruction as necessary to imaginative creation.

One key to Yeats's greatness is that there are many different Yeatses: a hard-nosed skeptic and an esoteric idealist, a nativist and a cosmopolitan, an Irish nationalist and an ironic antinationalist, a Romantic brooding on loss and unrequited desire and a modernist mocking idealism, nostalgia, and contemporary society. Similarly, in his poetic innovations and consolidations, he is both a conservative and a radical. That is, he is a literary traditionalist, working within such inherited genres as love poetry, the elegy, the self-elegy, the sonnet, and the occasional poem on public themes. But he is also a restless innovator who disrupts generic conventions, breaking up the coherence of the sonnet, de-idealizing the dead mourned in elegies, and bringing into public poems an intense personal ambivalence. In matters of form, too, he rhymes but often in off-rhyme, uses standard meters but bunches or scatters their stresses, employs an elegant syntax that nevertheless has the passionate urgency of colloquial speech; his diction, tone, enjambments, and stanzas intermix ceremony with contortion, controlled artifice with wayward unpredictability. A difficulty in reading Yeats—but also one of the great rewards—is comprehending his many-sidedness.

Like Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Windham Lewis, Yeats was attracted to right-wing politics, and in the 1930s he was briefly drawn to fascism. His late interest in authoritarian politics arose in part from his desire for a feudal, aristocratic society that, unlike middle-class culture, in his view, might allow the imagination to flourish, and in part from his anticolonialism, since he thought a fascist Spain, for

example, would “weaken the British Empire.” But eventually he was appalled by all political ideologies, and the grim prophecy of “The Second Coming” seemed to him increasingly apt.

Written in a rugged, colloquial, and concrete language, Yeats’s last poems have a controlled yet startling wildness. His return to life, to “the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart,” is one of the most impressive final phases of any poet’s career. In one of his last letters he wrote: “When I try to put all into a phrase I say, ‘Man can embody truth but he cannot know it.’ . . . The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence.” He died in southern France just before the beginning of World War II. His grave is, as his poem directed, near Sligo, “under Ben Bulbin.” He left behind a body of verse that, in variety and power, has been an enduring influence for English-language poets around the globe, from W. H. Auden and Seamus Heaney to Derek Walcott and A. K. Ramanujan.

The Stolen Child¹

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood² in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water-rats;
5 There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
10 *With a faery, hand in hand,*
For the world's more full of weeping than you can
understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim grey sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
15 We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
20 And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
25 *With a faery, hand in hand,*
For the world's more full of weeping than you can
understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
30 That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
35 From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
40 *For the world's more full of weeping than you can*
understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
45 Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
For he comes, the human child,
50 *To the waters and the wild*
With a faery, hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping than he can
understand.

1886, 1889

Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, a child stolen by fairies to be their companion, as in Irish folklore. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: This and other places mentioned in the poem are in County Sligo, in the west of Ireland, where Yeats spent much of his childhood.[Return to reference 2](#)

Down by the Salley Gardens¹

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white
feet.

She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the
tree;

But I, being young and foolish, with her would not
agree.

5 In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white
hand.

She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the
weirs;[°]

But I was young and foolish, and now am full of
tears.

1889

Endnotes

- Note 1: Originally titled "An Old Song Resung," with Yeats's footnote: "This is an attempt to reconstruct an old song from three lines imperfectly remembered by an old peasant woman in the village of Ballysodare, Sligo, who often sings them to herself." "Salley": a variant of *sallow*, a species of willow tree.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *dams*[Return to reference °](#)

The Rose of the World¹

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy² passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.³

5

We and the labouring world are passing by:
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
Lives on this lonely face.

10

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;
He made the world to be a grassy road
Before her wandering feet.

15

1892, 1895

Endnotes

- Note 1: The Platonic idea of eternal beauty. "I notice upon reading these poems for the first time for several years that the quality symbolized as The Rose differs from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar" [Yeats, in 1925]. Yeats wrote this poem to Maud Gonne.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Ancient city destroyed by the Greeks, according to legend, after the abduction of the beautiful Helen.[Return to](#)

[reference 2](#)

- Note 3: In Old Irish legend the Ulster warrior Naoise, son of Usna or Usnach (pronounced *Úskna*), eloped with the beautiful Deirdre, whom King Conchubar of Ulster had intended to marry, and with his two brothers took her to Scotland. Eventually Conchubar lured the four of them back to Ireland and killed the three brothers. [Return to reference 3](#)

The Lake Isle of Innisfree¹

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles²
made:

Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the
honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

5 And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple
glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

10 I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the
shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements
grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

18901890, 1892

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Inis Fraoigh (Heather Island) is a small island in Lough Gill, near Sligo, in the west of Ireland. In his autobiography Yeats writes:
"I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree . . . and when walking through

Fleet Street [in London] very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem *Innisfree*, my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music."

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Stakes interwoven with twigs or branches. [Return to reference 2](#)

The Sorrow of Love

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,
The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,
And all that famous harmony of leaves,
Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

5 A girl arose that had red mournful lips
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,
Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;¹

10 Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,
A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
And all that lamentation of the leaves,
Could but compose man's image and his cry.

18911892, 1925

Endnotes

- Note 1: Odysseus (whom the Romans called Ulysses) is the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, which describes how, after having fought in the siege of Troy, he wandered for ten years before reaching his home, the Greek island of Ithaca. Priam was king of Troy at the time of the siege and was killed when the Greeks captured the city.[Return to reference 1](#)

When You Are Old¹

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

5 How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

10 And bending down beside the glowing bars,²
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

18911892, 1899

Endnotes

- Note 1: A poem suggested by a sonnet by the French poet Pierre de Ronsard (1524–1585); it begins: “Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle” (When you are quite old, in the evening by candlelight).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, of the fireplace grate.[Return to reference 2](#)

Who Goes with Fergus?¹

Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
5 And brood on hopes and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love's bitter mystery;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,^o
And rules the shadows of the wood,
10 And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.

1893

Endnotes

- Note 1: In a late version of this Irish heroic legend, Fergus, "king of the proud Red Branch Kings," gave up his throne voluntarily to King Conchubar of Ulster to learn by dreaming and meditating the bitter wisdom of the poet and philosopher.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *bronze chariots*[Return to reference °](#)

The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland

He stood among a crowd at Drumahair;¹
His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
And he had known at last some tenderness,
Before earth took him to her stony care;
5 But when a man poured fish into a pile,
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
And sang what gold morning or evening sheds
Upon a woven world-forgotten isle
Where people love beside the ravelled² seas;
10 That Time can never mar a lover's vows
Under that woven changeless roof of boughs:
The singing shook him out of his new ease.

He wandered by the sands of Lissadell;
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
15 And he had known at last some prudent years
Before they heaped his grave under the hill;
But while he passed before a flashy place,
A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth
Sang that somewhere to north or west or south
20 There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race
Under the golden or the silver skies;
That if a dancer stayed his hungry foot
It seemed the sun and moon were in the fruit:
And at that singing he was no more wise.

25 He mused beside the well of Scanavin,
He mused upon his mockers: without fail
His sudden vengeance were a country tale,
When earthy night had drunk his body in;
But one small knot-grass growing by the pool

30 Sang where—unnecessary cruel voice—
Old silence bids its chosen race rejoice,
Whatever ravelled waters rise and fall
Or stormy silver fret the gold of day,
And midnight there enfold them like a fleece
And lover there by lover be at peace.
35 The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall;
And might have known at last unhaunted sleep
Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,
Now that the earth had taken man and all:
40 Did not the worms that spired about his bones
Proclaim with that unwearied, reedy cry
That God has laid His fingers on the sky,
That from those fingers glittering summer runs
Upon the dancer by the dreamless wave.
45 Why should those lovers that no lovers miss
Dream, until God burn Nature with a kiss?
The man has found no comfort in the grave.

1891, 1930

Endnotes

- Note 1: This and other place-names in the poem refer to locations in County Sligo.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tangled; here, turbulent.[Return to reference 2](#)

Adam's Curse¹

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I,² and talked of poetry.
I said, "A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
5 Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
10 Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

And thereupon
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
15 There's many a one shall find out all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet and low
Replied, "To be born woman is to know—
Although they do not talk of it at school—
20 That we must labour to be beautiful."

I said, "It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
25 Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

30 We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

35 I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

Nov. 1902 1902, 1922

Endnotes

- Note 1: When Adam was evicted from the Garden of Eden, God cursed him with a life of toil and labor (Genesis 3:17–19). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The two women in the poem are modeled on Maud Gonne and her sister, Kathleen Pilcher (1868–1919). [Return to reference 2](#)

No Second Troy

Why should I blame her¹ that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?
5 What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
10 Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?²

Dec. 19081910

Endnotes

- Note 1: Maud Gonne, whose revolutionary activities are at issue in the poem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Helen of Troy was the legendary cause of the Trojan War and thus of Troy's destruction.[Return to reference 2](#)

The Fascination of What's Difficult¹

The fascination of what's difficult
Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
Spontaneous joy and natural content
Out of my heart. There's something ails our colt²
That must, as if it had not holy blood
5 Nor on Olympus³ leaped from cloud to cloud,
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt
As though it dragged road metal. My curse on plays
That have to be set up in fifty ways,
10 On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
Theatre business, management of men.
I swear before the dawn comes round again
I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.

Sept. 1909–Mar. 1910

Endnotes

- Note 1: Written when Yeats was director-manager of the Abbey Theatre. "Subject. To complain of the fascination of what's difficult. It spoils spontaneity and pleasure, and wastes time. Repeat the line ending difficult three times and rhyme on bolt, exalt, colt, jolt" [*Yeats's diary for September 1909*]. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pegasus, in Greek mythology a winged horse associated with poetry. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A mountain in Greece; the home of the gods. [Return to reference 3](#)

A Coat

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
5 Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

19121914¹⁰

September 1913

What need you,¹ being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till^o
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
5 You have dried the marrow from the bone;
For men were born to pray and save:
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary² in the grave.

Yet they were of a different kind,
The names that stilled your childish play,
10 They have gone about the world like wind,
But little time had they to pray
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,
And what, God help us, could they save?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
15 It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Was it for this the wild geese³ spread
The grey wing upon every tide,
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
20 And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,⁴
All that delirium of the brave?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

Yet could we turn the years again,
25 And call those exiles as they were
In all their loneliness and pain,
You'd cry, "Some woman's yellow hair

Has maddened every mother's son":
 They weighed so lightly what they gave.
 But let them be, they're dead and gone,
 They're with O'Leary in the grave.

Sept. 1913

Endnotes

- Note 1: Members of the new, largely Roman Catholic middle class. When the art dealer Hugh Lane (d. 1915) offered to give his collection of French impressionist paintings to the city of Dublin, provided they were permanently housed in a suitable gallery, Yeats became angry over fierce public opposition to funding the project.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John O'Leary (1830–1907), Irish nationalist, who, after five years' imprisonment and fifteen years' exile, returned to Dublin in 1885; he rallied the young Yeats to the cause of literary nationalism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Popular name for the Irish who, because of the penal laws against Catholics (1695–1727), were forced to flee to the Continent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:
 Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763–1798), one of the chief founders of the United Irishmen (an Irish nationalist organization) and leader of the 1798 Irish Rising, committed suicide in prison. Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763–1798), British officer who, after being dismissed from the army for disloyal activities, joined the United Irishmen, helped lead the 1798 Irish Rising, and died in prison. Robert Emmet (1778–1803), a leader of the abortive 1803 Irish Nationalist Revolt, was hanged for treason.
[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *cash register* [Return to reference °](#)

Easter, 1916¹

I have met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth-century houses.
5 I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words,
Or have lingered awhile and said
Polite meaningless words,
And thought before I had done
10 Of a mocking tale or a gibe
To please a companion
Around the fire at the club,
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley² is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
15 A terrible beauty is born.

That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good-will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
20 What voice more sweet than hers
When, young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?³
This man had kept a school
And rode our wingèd horse;⁴
25 This other his helper and friend⁵
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,

30 So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vainglorious lout.⁶
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
35 Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
40 A terrible beauty is born.

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road,
45 The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute they change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
50 A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it;
The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call;
Minute by minute they live:
55 The stone's in the midst of all.

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven's part, our part
60 To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come

On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
65 No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.⁷
We know their dream; enough
70 To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse—
MacDonagh and MacBride
75 And Connolly⁸ and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

80
May–Sept. 1916 1916, 1920

Endnotes

- Note 1:
During the Easter Rising of 1916, Irish nationalists revolted against the British government and proclaimed an Irish Republic. Nearly sixteen hundred Irish Volunteers and two hundred members of the Citizen Army seized buildings and a park in Dublin. The rebellion began on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916, and was crushed in six days. Over the next two weeks fifteen of the leaders were executed by firing squad. Yeats knew the chief nationalist leaders personally.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The multicolored clothes of a jester.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Constance Gore-Booth (1868–1927), afterward Countess Markievicz, took a prominent role in the uprising. Her death sentence was reduced to imprisonment. The other rebel leaders to whom Yeats refers were executed.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Padraic Pearse (1879–1916), founder of a boys' school in Dublin and poet—hence the “winged horse,” or Pegasus, the horse of the Muses.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Thomas MacDonagh (1878–1916), poet and dramatist.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Major John MacBride (1865–1916), Irish revolutionary and estranged husband of Maud Gonne.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In 1914 the English government had passed Home Rule for Ireland into law, but because of World War I had suspended it, promising to implement it later.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: James Connolly (1870–1916), a trade-union organizer and military commander of the rebellion.[Return to reference 8](#)

The Wild Swans at Coole¹

5 The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

10 The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count²
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

15 I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.

20 Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

25 But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,

By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

³⁰
Oct. 1916 1917

Endnotes

- Note 1: Coole Park, in County Galway, was the estate of the Irish playwright Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Yeats made his first long visit to Coole in 1897; from then on he spent summers there, often staying into the fall.[Return to reference 2](#)

An Irish Airman Foresees His Death¹

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
5 My country is Kiltartan Cross,²
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
10 Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
15 In balance with this life, this death.

19191920

Endnotes

- Note 1: Robert Gregory (1881–1918), the only child of Yeats's close friend and patroness Augusta, Lady Gregory, was killed on the Italian front as a member of the British Royal Flying Corps.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Crossroads village in County Galway, near Coole Park.[Return to reference 2](#)

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre¹
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
5 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.²

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
10 The Second Coming!³ Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*⁴
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
15 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
20 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem⁵ to be born?

Jan. 1919 1920, 1921

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Yeats's term (pronounced with a hard "g") for a spiraling motion in the shape of a cone. He envisions the two-thousand-year

cycle of the Christian age as spiraling toward its end and the next historical cycle as beginning after a violent reversal: "the end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction" [*Yeats's note*].

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The poem was written in January 1919, in the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution and on the eve of the Anglo-Irish War. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Christ's second coming is heralded by the coming of the Beast of the Apocalypse, or Antichrist (1 John 2:18). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: World spirit, or universal spirit (Latin); that is, Yeats said, "a general storehouse of images," a collective unconscious or memory, in which the human race preserves its past memories. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Jesus's birthplace. [Return to reference 5](#)

A Prayer for My Daughter

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on.¹ There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood² and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
5 Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child an
hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
10 And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
15 Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
20 Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.

25 Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool³
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,⁴

Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
30 A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty⁵ is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
35 Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.
40

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet^o be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Not but in merriment begin a chase,
45 Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
50 Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
55 Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman⁶ born

60 Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

65 Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
70 She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
75 Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

80

Feb.–June 1919, 1921

Endnotes

- Note 1: Yeats's daughter and first child, Anne Butler Yeats, was born on February 26, 1919, in Dublin and brought home to Yeats's refitted Norman tower of Thoor Ballylee in Galway.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lady Gregory's wood at Coole, only a few miles from Thoor Ballylee.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Menelaus, Helen's husband. Her abduction by Paris precipitated the Trojan War.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Venus, born from the sea, was the Roman goddess of love; her husband, Vulcan, was the lame god of fire and metalwork (line 29).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Greek mythology, the goat's horn that suckled the god Zeus flowed with nectar and ambrosia; the cornucopia thus became a symbol of plenty.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Maud Gonne.[Return to reference 6](#)

Notes

- °: *small songbird*[Return to reference °](#)

Leda and the Swan¹

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

5 How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

10 A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower²
And Agamemnon dead.

 Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Sept. 1923 1924, 1928

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In Greek mythology the god Zeus, in the form of a swan, raped Leda, a mortal. Helen, Clytemnestra, Castor, and Pollux were the children of this union. Yeats saw Leda's rape as the beginning of a new age, analogous with the dove's annunciation to Mary of Jesus's conception: "I imagine the annunciation that founded Greece as made to Leda, remembering that they showed in a Spartan temple, strung up to the roof as a holy relic, an

unhatched egg of hers, and that from one of her eggs came love and from the other war" (*A Vision*).

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: That is, the destruction of Troy, caused by Helen's abduction by Paris. Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army that besieged Troy, was murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra, the other daughter of Leda and the swan. [Return to reference 2](#)

Sailing to Byzantium¹

1

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
5 Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

2

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
10 Soul clap its hands and sing,² and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
15 To the holy city of Byzantium.

3

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,³
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,⁴
And be the singing-masters of my soul.

20 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

4

25 Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;⁵
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
30 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Sept. 1926 1927

Endnotes

- Note 1:

Yeats wrote in *A Vision*: "I think that if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium [now Istanbul] a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato [in the 6th century C.E.]. . . . I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers . . . spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people."

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The poet William Blake (1757–1827) saw the soul of his dead brother rising to heaven, “clapping his hands for joy.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The mosaics in Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, in Ravenna, Italy, depict rows of Christian saints on a gold background; Yeats saw them in 1907.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, whirl in a spiral.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: I have read somewhere that in the Emperor’s palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang [*Yeats’s note*].[Return to reference 5](#)

Among School Children

1

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher^o and to sing,
To study reading-books and history,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
5 In the best modern way—the children's eyes
In momentary wonder stare upon
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.¹

2

I dream of a Ledaean² body, bent
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
10 Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy—
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
15 Into the yolk and white of the one shell.³

3

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at that age—
For even daughters of the swan can share

20 Something of every paddler's heritage—
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
She stands before me as a living child.

4

25 Her present image floats into the mind—
Did Quattrocento finger⁴ fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledaean kind
30 Had pretty plumage once—enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

5

35 What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
Honey of generation had betrayed,
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
As recollection or the drug decide,⁵
Would think her son, did she but see that shape
With sixty or more winters on its head,
A compensation for the pang of his birth,
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?
40

6

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;⁶
Solider Aristotle played the taws
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;⁷

45 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras⁸
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

7

50 Both nuns and mothers worship images,
But those the candles light are not as those
That animate a mother's reveries,
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
And yet they too break hearts—O Presences
That passion, piety or affection knows,
55 And that all heavenly glory symbolise—
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

8

60 Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?^o
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

June 19261927

Endnotes

- Note 1: Yeats, as part of his work in the Irish Senate, visited a Montessori school in Waterford in 1926.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A body like Leda's. Yeats associated her daughter, Helen of Troy, with Maud Gonne.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the *Symposium*, by the Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 428–ca. 348 B.C.E.), Aristophanes argues that “the primeval man” was both male and female but was divided (like an egg separated into yolk and white); the resulting two beings come together in love to become one again.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, the skill of a 15th-century Italian painter.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: I have taken the “honey of generation” from Porphyry's essay on “The Cave of Nymphs” [*Yeats's note*]. Porphyry (ca. 234–ca. 305 C.E.) was a Neo-platonic philosopher.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: As he explained in the famed “Allegory of the Cave” in his *Republic*, Plato thought nature merely an image of an ideal world that exists elsewhere.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Plato's student Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) was “solider” because he regarded this world as the authentic one. He tutored Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.E.), the “king of kings,” and disciplined him with the “taws,” or leather strap.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Greek philosopher (ca. 580–500 B.C.E), known for his doctrine of the harmony of the spheres and his discovery of the mathematical basis of musical intervals. His disciples, the Pythagoreans, venerated their master as a god with a golden thigh.[Return to reference 8](#)

Notes

- °: *do arithmetic*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *trunk*[Return to reference °](#)

A Dialogue of Self and Soul¹

1

5 *My Soul.* I summon to the winding ancient stair;
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done:
Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?

10 *My Self.* The consecrated blade upon my knees
Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
Unspotted by the centuries;
That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
From some court-lady's dress and round
15 The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn.

20 *My Soul.* Why should the imagination of a man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war?
Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that and t'other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth.

25 *My Self.* Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it
Five hundred years ago, about it lie

Flowers from I know not what embroidery—
Heart's purple—and all these I set
For emblems of the day against the tower
Emblematical of the night,
30 And claim as by a soldier's right
A charter to commit the crime once more.

My Soul. Such fullness in that quarter overflows
And falls into the basin of the mind
That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,
35 For intellect no longer knows
Is from the *Ought*, or *Knower* from the *Known*—
That is to say, ascends to Heaven;
Only the dead can be forgiven;
40 But when I think of that my tongue's a stone.

2

My Self. A living man is blind and drinks his drop.
What matter if the ditches are impure?
What matter if I live it all once more?
Endure that toil of growing up;
45 The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
Of boyhood changing into man;
The unfinished man and his pain
Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;

The finished man among his enemies?—
How in the name of Heaven can he escape
50 That defiling and disfigured shape
The mirror of malicious eyes
Casts upon his eyes until at last
He thinks that shape must be his shape?
And what's the good of an escape
55 If honour find him in the wintry blast?

60 I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man battering blind men;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.

65 I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
70 We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.

July–Dec. 19271929

Endnotes

- Note 1: In a letter of October 2, 1923, Yeats wrote: "I am writing a new tower poem 'Sword and Tower,' which is a choice of rebirth rather than deliverance from birth. I make my Japanese sword and its silk covering my symbol of life." Junzo Sato, a friend, had given him the ceremonial sword in 1920.[Return to reference 1](#)

Byzantium¹

The unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
After great cathedral gong;
5 A starlit or a moonlit dome² disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire^o of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
10 For Hades' bobbin³ bound in mummy-cloth
May unwind the winding path;⁴
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;
I hail the superhuman;
15 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.⁵

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the starlit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
20 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
25 Flames that no faggot^o feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come

30 And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

35 Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,⁶
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor!
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

40
Sept. 1930 1932

Endnotes

- Note 1:
On October 4, 1930, Yeats sent his friend Sturge Moore a copy of this poem, saying: "The poem originates from a criticism of yours. You objected to the last verse of 'Sailing to Byzantium' because a bird made by a goldsmith was just as natural as anything else. That showed me that the idea needed exposition." The previous April, Yeats had noted in his diary: "Subject for a poem": "Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millennium. A walking mummy. Flames at the street corners where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour [dolphins] offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to Paradise."
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Of the great church of St. Sophia. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spool. Hades was the Greek god of the underworld, the realm of the dead. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: That is, the spool of people's fate, which spins their destiny and which is wound like a mummy, may be unwound and lead to the timeless world of pure spirit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: On Roman tombstones the cock is a herald of rebirth, thus of the continuing cycle of human life.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In ancient mythology dolphins were thought to carry the souls of the dead to the Isles of the Blessed.[Return to reference 6](#)

Notes

- °: *deep mud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *bundle of sticks*[Return to reference °](#)

Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop¹

I met the Bishop on the road
And much said he and I.
"Those breasts are flat and fallen now
Those veins must soon be dry;
5 Live in a heavenly mansion,
Not in some foul sty."

"Fair and foul are near of kin,
And fair needs foul," I cried.
"My friends are gone, but that's a truth
10 Nor grave nor bed denied,
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart's pride.

"A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
15 But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent."

Nov. 19311932

Endnotes

- Note 1: One of a series of poems about an old woman partly modeled on Cracked Mary, an old woman who lived near Lady Gregory.[Return to reference 1](#)

Lapis Lazuli

*(For Harry Clifton)*¹

I have heard that hysterical women say
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow,
Of poets that are always gay,
For everybody knows or else should know
5 That if nothing drastic is done²
Aeroplane and Zeppelin³ will come out,
Pitch like King Billy⁴ bomb-balls in
Until the town lie beaten flat.

All perform their tragic play,
There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
10 That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
Yet they, should the last scene be there,
The great stage curtain about to drop,
If worthy their prominent part in the play,
Do not break up their lines to weep.
15 They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.
All men have aimed at, found and lost;
Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
20 Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
And all the drop scenes drop at once
Upon a hundred thousand stages,
It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

25 On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,
Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,

Old civilisations put to the sword.
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus⁵
30 Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
35 All things fall and are built again
And those that build them again are gay.

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,
Over them flies a long-legged bird
40 A symbol of longevity;
The third, doubtless a serving-man,
Carries a musical instrument.

Every discolouration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent
45 Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
50 Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare.
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play.
55 Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.

July 1936 1938

Endnotes

- Note 1:
The English writer Harry Clifton (1908–1978) gave Yeats for his seventieth birthday a piece of lapis lazuli, a deep blue stone, “carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths, and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain. Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry” [*Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, July 6, 1935*].
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Because Europe was (in 1936) close to war.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: German zeppelins, or airships, bombed London during World War I.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: King William III (William of Orange), who defeated the army of King James II at the Battle of the Boyne, in Ireland, in 1690. In a popular ballad, “King William he threw his bomb-balls in, / And set them on fire.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
Athenian sculptor (5th century B.C.E.), supposedly the originator of the Corinthian column and of the use of the running drill to imitate folds in drapery in statues. Yeats wrote of him: “With Callimachus pure Ionic revives again . . . and upon the only example of his work known to us, a marble chair, a Persian is represented, and may one not discover a Persian symbol in that bronze lamp, shaped like a palm . . . ? But he was an archaistic workman, and those who set him to work brought back public life to an older form” (*A Vision*).
[Return to reference 5](#)

Under Ben Bulben¹

1

Swear by what the Sages spoke
Round the Mareotic Lake²
That the Witch of Atlas knew,
Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.
Swear by those horsemen, by those women,
5 Complexion and form prove superhuman,³
That pale, long visaged company
That airs an immortality
Completeness of their passions won;
Now they ride the wintry dawn
10 Where Ben Bulben sets the scene.

Here's the gist of what they mean.

2

Many times man lives and dies
Between his two eternities,
That of race and that of soul,
15 And ancient Ireland knew it all.
Whether man dies in his bed
Or the rifle knocks him dead,
A brief parting from those dear
Is the worst man has to fear.
20 Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
Sharp their spades, their muscle strong,
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again.

3

25 You that Mitchel's prayer have heard
"Send war in our time, O Lord!"⁴
Know that when all words are said
And a man is fighting mad,
Something drops from eyes long blind
He completes his partial mind,
30 For an instant stands at ease,
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace,
Even the wisest man grows tense
With some sort of violence
Before he can accomplish fate,
35 Know his work or choose his mate.

4

Poet and sculptor do the work
Nor let the modish painter shirk
What his great forefathers did,
Bring the soul of man to God,
40 Make him fill the cradles right.
Measurement began our might:
Forms a stark Egyptian thought,
Forms that gentler Phidias⁵ wrought.

45 Michael Angelo left a proof
On the Sistine Chapel roof,
Where but half-awakened Adam
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
Till her bowels are in heat,
Proof that there's a purpose set
50 Before the secret working mind:
Profane perfection of mankind.

Quattrocento⁶ put in paint,
On backgrounds for a God or Saint,
Gardens where a soul's at ease;
55 Where everything that meets the eye
Flowers and grass and cloudless sky
Resemble forms that are, or seem
When sleepers wake and yet still dream,
And when it's vanished still declare,
60 With only bed and bedstead there,
That Heavens had opened.

Gyres⁷ run on;
When that greater dream had gone
Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude⁸
65 Prepared a rest for the people of God,
Palmer's⁹ Phrase, but after that
Confusion fell upon our thought.

5

Irish poets learn your trade
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
70 All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.
Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen,
75 The holiness of monks, and after
Porter-drinkers'¹ randy laughter;
Sing the lords and ladies gay
That were beaten into the clay
Through seven heroic centuries;²
80 Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be

Still the indomitable Irishry.

6

85 Under bare Ben Bulben's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid,
An ancestor was rector there³
Long years ago; a church stands near,
By the road an ancient Cross.
No marble, no conventional phrase,
90 On limestone quarried near the spot
By his command these words are cut:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!

Sept. 1938 1939

Endnotes

- Note 1: A mountain near Sligo; Yeats's grave is in sight of it, in Drumcliff churchyard. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
Lake Mareotis, near Alexandria, Egypt, was an ancient center of Christian Neoplatonism and of neo-Pythagorean philosophy. The lake is mentioned in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "The Witch of Atlas." In an essay on Shelley, Yeats interprets the witch as a symbol of timeless, absolute beauty; passing in a boat by this and another lake, she "sees all human life shadowed upon its waters . . . and because she can see the reality of things she is described as journeying 'in the calm depths' of 'the wide lake' we journey over unpiloted."
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Superhuman beings or fairies, like the Sidhe, believed to ride through the countryside near Ben Bulben. [Return to](#)

[reference 3](#)

- Note 4: From *Jail Journal*, by the Irish nationalist John Mitchel (1815–1875).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Greek sculptor (fl. ca. 490–430 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Fifteenth-century Italian art.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Yeats's term for conelike spirals or cycles of history.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Edward Calvert (1799–1883), English visionary artist and follower of William Blake (1757–1827), English mystical poet and artist. Richard Wilson (1714–1782), English landscape painter and disciple of Claude Lorraine (1600–1682), French artist.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Samuel Palmer (1805–1881), English landscape painter who admired Blake.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Drinkers of dark brown bitter beer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Since the Norman conquest of Ireland, in the 12th century.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Yeats's great-grandfather, the Reverend John Yeats (1774–1846), was rector of Drumcliff Church, Sligo.[Return to reference 3](#)

Man and the Echo

Man. In a cleft that's christened Alt
Under broken stone I halt
At the bottom of a pit
That broad noon has never lit,
And shout a secret to the stone.
5 All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right.
10 Did that play of mine¹ send out
Certain men the English shot?
Did words of mine put too great strain
On that woman's reeling brain?²
Could my spoken words have checked
15 That whereby a house³ lay wrecked?
And all seems evil until I
Sleepless would lie down and die.

Echo. Lie down and die.

Man. That were to shirk
The spiritual intellect's great work
20 And shirk it in vain. There is no release
In a bodkin⁴ or disease,
Nor can there be a work so great
As that which cleans man's dirty slate.
While man can still his body keep
25 Wine or love drug him to sleep,
Waking he thanks the Lord that he
Has body and its stupidity,

30 But body gone he sleeps no more
And till his intellect grows sure
That all's arranged in one clear view
Pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
Then stands in judgment on his soul,
And, all work done, dismisses all
35 Out of intellect and sight
And sinks at last into the night.

Echo. Into the night.

Man. O rocky voice
Shall we in that great night rejoice?
What do we know but that we face
40 One another in this place?
But hush, for I have lost the theme
Its joy or night seem but a dream;
Up there some hawk or owl has struck
Dropping out of sky or rock,
45 A stricken rabbit is crying out
And its cry distracts my thought.

19381939

Endnotes

- Note 1: *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a nationalist play Yeats wrote with Lady Gregory and in which Maud Gonne played the title role in 1902. It helped inspire the Easter Rising of 1916.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Margot Ruddock (1907–1951), a young poet with whom Yeats had a brief affair in the 1930s and to whom he offered financial support when she suffered a nervous breakdown.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Coole Park, Lady Gregory's home, in disrepair after her death in 1932.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Dagger. See *Hamlet* 3.1.77–78: “When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin.”[Return to reference 4](#)

The Circus Animals' Desertion

1

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
Maybe at last being but a broken man,
I must be satisfied with my heart, although
5 Winter and summer till old age began
My circus animals were all on show,
Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,
Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.¹

2

What can I but enumerate old themes,
10 First that sea-rider Oisín² led by the nose
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,
Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,
That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;
But what cared I that set him on to ride,
15 I, starved for the bosom of his fairy bride.

And then a counter-truth filled out its play,
"The Countess Cathleen"³ was the name I gave it,
She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away,
But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.
20 I thought my dear must her own soul destroy
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,
And this brought forth a dream and soon enough
This dream itself had all my thought and love.

25 And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea;⁴
Heart mysteries there, and yet when all is said
It was the dream itself enchanted me:
Character isolated by a deed
30 To engross the present and dominate memory.
Players and painted stage took all my love
And not those things that they were emblems of.

3

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind but out of what began?
35 A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone
I must lie down where all the ladders start
40 In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart.

1939

Endnotes

- Note 1: Yeats refers to the ancient Irish heroes of his early work ("Those stilted boys"), the gilded carriage of his play *The Unicorn from the Stars* (1908), and the lion in several of his poems, including "The Second Coming." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the long title poem of Yeats's first successful book, *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889), the legendary poet warrior Oisín (pronounced *Ushēēn*) is enchanted by the beautiful fairy woman Niamh (pronounced *Neeve*), who leads him to the Islands of Delight, of Many Fears, and of Forgetfulness. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A play (published in 1892) about an Irish countess (an idealized version of Maud Gonne) who sells her soul to the devil

to buy food for the starving Irish poor but is taken up to heaven (for God "Looks always on the motive, not the deed").[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: In Yeats's play *On Baile's Strand* (1904), the legendary warrior Cuchulain (pronounced *CuHOOlin* by Yeats, *KooHULLin* in Irish), crazed by his discovery that he has killed his son, fights with the sea.[Return to reference 4](#)

From Introduction **[A General Introduction for My Work]^{[1](#)}**

Endnotes

- Note 1: Written in 1937 and originally printed as "A General Introduction for My Work" in *Essays and Introductions* (1961), the text is excerpted from *Later Essays*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (1994), vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*.[Return to reference 1](#)

I. The First Principle

A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedies, whatever it be, remorse, lost love or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria. Dante and Milton had mythologies, Shakespeare the characters of English history, of traditional romance; even when the poet seems most himself, when Raleigh and gives potentates the lie,² or Shelley 'a nerve o'er which do creep the else unfelt oppressions of mankind',³ or Byron when 'the heart wears out the breast as the sword wears out the sheath',⁴ he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been re-born as an idea, something intended, complete. A novelist might describe his accident, his incoherence, he must not, he is more type than man, more passion than type. He is Lear, Romeo, Oedipus, Tiresias; he has stepped out of a play and even the woman he loves is Rosalind, Cleopatra, never The Dark Lady.⁵ He is part of his own phantasmagoria and we adore him because nature has grown intelligible, and by so doing a part of our creative power. 'When mind is lost in the light of the Self', says the Prashna Upanishad,⁶ 'it dreams no more; still in the body it is lost in happiness.' 'A wise man seeks in Self', says the Chāndôgya Upanishad, 'those that are alive and those that are dead and gets what the world cannot give.' The world knows nothing because it has made nothing, we know everything because we have made everything.

Endnotes

- Note 2: From "The Lie," by the English writer and explorer Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618): "Tell potentates, they live / Acting by others' action; / Not loved unless they give, / Not strong but by a faction: / If potentates' reply, / Give potentates the lie." [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: From “Julian and Maddalo,” by the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See “So, we’ll go no more a roving,” by the English poet George Gordon, Lord Byron.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The woman to whom many of Shakespeare’s de-idealizing sonnets are addressed. The rest of the names refer to characters in Shakespeare’s plays and in Sophocles’ ancient Greek drama *Oedipus the King*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: One of a series of ancient philosophical dialogues in Sanskrit. From *Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937), translated by Yeats and the Indian monk Shri Purohit Swami (1882–1941).[Return to reference 6](#)

II. Subject-Matter

* * *

I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory⁷ has no reality, that the natural and supernatural are knit together, that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science; at that moment Europeans may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in dead history, but flowing, concrete, phenomenal.

I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it; my Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of St Patrick⁸ as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's 'Imagination',⁹ what the Upanishads have named 'Self': nor is this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but imminent,¹ differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt, and leg of frog'.²

Subconscious preoccupation with this theme brought me *A Vision*,³ its harsh geometry an incomplete interpretation. The 'Irishry' have preserved their ancient 'deposit' through wars which, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became wars of extermination; no people, Lecky said at the opening of his *Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*,⁴ have undergone greater persecution, nor did that persecution altogether cease up to our own day. No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive; there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression. It is not enough to have put it into the mouth of a rambling peasant poet. Then I remind myself that, though mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris,⁵ and to the English language in which I think, speak and

write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is eaten by a wild beast and learns on waking that he himself is eater and eaten. This is Irish hatred and solitude, the hatred of human life that made Swift write *Gulliver*⁶ and the epitaph upon his tomb, that can still make us wag between extremes and doubt our sanity.

Again and again I am asked why I do not write in Gaelic; some four or five years ago I was invited to dinner by a London society and found myself among London journalists, Indian students and foreign political refugees. An Indian paper says it was a dinner in my honour, I hope not; I have forgotten though I have a clear memory of my own angry mind. I should have spoken as men are expected to speak at public dinners; I should have paid and been paid conventional compliments; then they would speak of the refugees, from that on all would be lively and topical, foreign tyranny would be arraigned, England seem even to those confused Indians the protector of liberty; I grew angrier and angrier; Wordsworth, that typical Englishman, had published his famous sonnet to François Dominique Toussaint, a Santo Domingo negro:

There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee⁷

in the year when Emmet conspired and died, and he remembered that rebellion as little as the half hanging and the pitch cap that preceded it by half a dozen years.⁸ That there might be no topical speeches I denounced the oppression of the people of India; being a man of letters, not a politician, I told how they had been forced to learn everything, even their own Sanscrit, through the vehicle of English till the first discoverers of wisdom had become bywords for vague abstract facility. I begged the Indian writers present to remember that no man can think or write with music and vigour except in his mother tongue. I turned a friendly audience hostile, yet when I think of that scene I am unrepentant and angry.

I could no more have written in Gaelic than can those Indians write in English; Gaelic is my national language, but it is not my mother tongue.

Endnotes

- Note 7: Theory explaining the universe in strictly naturalistic, Newtonian terms.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: From the second paragraph of "The Confession of St. Patrick, or His Epistle to the Irish," by the 5th-century saint, the apostle of Ireland.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In *Jerusalem* the English poet William Blake (1757–1827) describes imagination as the "Divine body of the lord Jesus." Yeats's ideas about the Unity of Being are drawn from his reading of Dante's *Il Convito*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In manuscript Yeats wrote "immanent" (a misspelling of "immanent"), but he allowed "imminent" to stand in the typescript.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Yeats's paraphrase of the ingredients of the witches' cauldron in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 4.1.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Yeats's mystical writings (1925, 1937), in which he sketches out and schematizes many of his theories.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, by the Irish historian William Edward Hartpole Lecky (1838–1903).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: English poet and textile designer (1834–1896). Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), English poet who, in addition to poetic works such as *The Faerie Queene*, wrote a treatise proposing the extermination of the Irish.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Gulliver's Travels*, by the Irish satirist Jonathan Swift (1667–1745). Yeats's poem "Swift's Epitaph," a loose translation of the Latin on Swift's tomb, claims that "Swift has sailed into his rest; / Savage indignation there / Cannot lacerate his breast."[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: From “To Toussaint L’Ouverture,” by the English poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850). L’Ouverture (1743–1803) died in prison after rebelling against France’s rule in Haiti.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Paper caps filled with burning pitch were used for torture during the martial law preceding and following the Irish Rising of 1798. Robert Emmet (1778–1803), Irish nationalist executed after the Irish rebellion of 1803.[Return to reference 8](#)

III. Style and Attitude

Style is almost unconscious. I know what I have tried to do, little what I have done. Contemporary lyric poems, even those that moved me—'The Stream's Secret', 'Dolores'⁹—seemed too long, but an Irish preference for a swift current might be mere indolence, yet Burns may have felt the same when he read Thomson and Cowper.¹ The English mind is meditative, rich, deliberate; it may remember the Thames² valley. I planned to write short lyrics or poetic drama where every speech [would] be short and concentrated, knit by dramatic tension, and I did so with more confidence because young English poets were at that time writing out of emotion at the moment of crisis, though their old slow-moving meditation returned almost at once. Then, and in this English poetry has followed my lead, I tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech. I wanted to write in whatever language comes most naturally when we soliloquise, as I do all day long, upon the events of our own lives or of any life where we can see ourselves for the moment. I sometimes compare myself with the mad old slum women I hear denouncing and remembering; 'how dare you,' I heard one say of some imaginary suitor, 'and you without health or a home'. If I spoke my thoughts aloud they might be as angry and as wild. It was a long time before I had made a language to my liking; I began to make it when I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought words in common use,³ but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza. Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language. Ezra Pound, Turner, Lawrence, wrote admirable free verse, I could not.⁴ I would lose myself, become joyless like those mad old women. The translators of the Bible, Sir Thomas Browne,⁵ certain translators from the Greek when translators still bothered about rhythm, created a form midway between prose and verse that seems natural to impersonal meditation; but all that is personal soon rots; it

must be packed in ice or salt. Once when I was in delirium from pneumonia I dictated a letter to George Moore⁶ telling him to eat salt because it was a symbol of eternity; the delirium passed, I had no memory of that letter, but I must have meant what I now mean. If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accident, I would be full of self-contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and I foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional. I commit my emotion to shepherds, herdsmen, camel-drivers, learned men, Milton's or Shelley's Platonist, that tower Palmer drew.⁷ Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing. Ancient salt is best packing. The heroes of Shakespeare convey to us through their looks, or through the metaphorical patterns of their speech, the sudden enlargement of their vision, their ecstasy at the approach of death, 'She should have died hereafter', 'Of many million kisses, the poor last', 'Absent thee from felicity awhile'; they have become God or Mother Goddess, the pelican, 'My baby at my breast',⁸ but all must be cold; no actress has ever sobbed when she played Cleopatra, even the shallow brain of a producer has never thought of such a thing. The supernatural is present, cold winds blow across our hands, upon our faces, the thermometer falls, and because of that cold we are hated by journalists and groundlings. There may be in this or that detail painful tragedy, but in the whole work none. I have heard Lady Gregory say, rejecting some play in the modern manner sent to the Abbey Theatre, 'Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies.' Nor is it any different with lyrics, songs, narrative poems; neither scholars nor the populace have sung or read anything generation after generation because of its pain. The maid of honour whose tragedy they sing must be lifted out of history with timeless pattern, she is one of the four Maries,⁹ the rhythm is old and familiar, imagination must dance, must be carried beyond feeling into the aboriginal ice. Is ice the correct word? I once boasted, copying the phrase from a

letter of my father's, that I would write a poem 'cold and passionate as the dawn'.¹

When I wrote in blank verse I was dissatisfied; my vaguely mediaeval *Countess Cathleen* fitted the measure, but our Heroic Age went better, or so I fancied, in the ballad metre of *The Green Helmet*.² There was something in what I felt about Deirdre, about Cuchulain,³ that rejected the Renaissance and its characteristic metres, and this was a principal reason why I created in dance plays the form that varies blank verse with lyric metres. When I speak blank verse and analyse my feelings I stand at a moment of history when instinct, its traditional songs and dances, its general agreement, is of the past. I have been cast up out of the whale's belly though I still remember the sound and sway that came from beyond its ribs,⁴ and, like the Queen in Paul Fort's ballad,⁵ I smell of the fish of the sea. The contrapuntal structure of the verse, to employ a term adopted by Robert Bridges,⁶ combines the past and present. If I repeat the first line of *Paradise Lost* so as to emphasise its five feet I am among the folk singers, 'Of mán's first dísobéidience ánd the frúit', but speak it as I should I cross it with another emphasis, that of passionate prose, 'Of mán's first disobéidience and the frúit', or 'Of mán's fírst dísobedience and the frúit', the folk song is still there, but a ghostly voice, an unvariable possibility, an unconscious norm. What moves me and my hearer is a vivid speech that has no laws except that it must not exorcise the ghostly voice. I am awake and asleep, at my moment of revelation, self-possessed in self-surrender; there is no rhyme, no echo of the beaten drum, the dancing foot, that would upset my balance. When I was a boy I wrote a poem upon dancing that had one good line: 'They snatch with their hands at the sleep of the skies.' If I sat down and thought for a year I would discover that but for certain syllabic limitations, a rejection or acceptance of certain elisions, I must wake or sleep.

The Countess Cathleen could speak a blank verse which I had loosened, almost put out of joint, for her need, because I thought of her as mediaeval and thereby connected her with the general

European movement. For Deirdre and Cuchulain and all the other figures of Irish legend are still in the whale's belly.

Endnotes

- Note 9: Long poems by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), respectively.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: James Thomson (1700–1748) and William Cowper (1731–1800), poets most famous for their long poems. Robert Burns (1759–1796), Scottish poet of short lyrics.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: River that runs through London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth says that poetry should be written in “language really used by men.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), Yeats included free verse by the American poet Ezra Pound (1885–1972), the English poet Walter Turner (1889–1946), and the English poet and novelist D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: English physician and author (1605–1682) with an elaborate prose style.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Irish novelist (1852–1933).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The English artist Samuel Palmer (1805–1881) drew *The Lonely Tower* (1879) as an illustration of Milton's poem about the pensive man, “Il Penseroso” (1645), in which a scholar in a “high lonely tower” is dedicated to uncovering Plato's insights; in Shelley's “Prince Athanase,” the idealistic hero searches for love.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: From *Macbeth* 5.4, *Anthony and Cleopatra* 4.15, *Hamlet* 5.2, respectively. “Pelican”: thought to feed its babies with its blood and thus often a symbol of self-sacrifice.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–1587), was served by four women named Mary.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: From “The Fisherman” (1916): “Before I am old / I shall have written him one / Poem maybe as cold / And passionate as the dawn.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: *The Countess Cathleen* (1892, later revised) is written in blank verse; *The Green Helmet* (1910), in iambic heptameter, which resembles the meter of a ballad (alternating between four- and three-stress lines).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The warrior hero of the Irish mythological Ulster Cycle; he also appears in Yeats’s “dance” plays, derived from Japanese Noh drama. “Deirdre”: in the Ulster Cycle, woman chosen to be queen of Ulster before she elopes with Naoise (pronounced *Neesha*).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Jonah 2:10: “And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: “La Reine à la Mer” (“The Queen of the Sea,” 1894–96), by the French poet Paul Fort (1872–1960).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: English poet (1844–1930), who stressed the poetic tension of the counterpoint between regular meters and the rhythm of poetry as actually spoken.[Return to reference 6](#)

IV. Whither?

The young English poets reject dream and personal emotion; they have thought out opinions that join them to this or that political party; they employ an intricate psychology, action in character, not as in the ballads character in action, and all consider that they have a right to the same close attention that men pay to the mathematician and the metaphysician. One of the more distinguished has just explained that man has hitherto slept but must now awake.⁷ They are determined to express the factory, the metropolis, that they may be modern. Young men teaching school in some picturesque cathedral town, or settled for life in Capri or in Sicily, defend their type of metaphor by saying that it comes naturally to a man who travels to his work by Tube.⁸ I am indebted to a man of this school who went through my work at my request, crossing out all conventional metaphors,⁹ but they seem to me to have rejected also those dream associations which were the whole art of Mallarmé.¹ He had topped a previous wave. As they express not what the Upanishads call 'that ancient Self' but individual intellect, they have the right to choose the man in the Tube because of his objective importance. They attempt to kill the whale, push the Renaissance higher yet, out-think Leonardo;² their verse kills the folk ghost and yet would remain verse. I am joined to the 'Irishry' and I expect a counter-Renaissance. No doubt it is part of the game to push that Renaissance; I make no complaint; I am accustomed to the geometrical arrangement of history in *A Vision*, but I go deeper than 'custom' for my convictions. When I stand upon O'Connell Bridge³ in the half-light and notice that discordant architecture, all those electric signs, where modern heterogeneity has taken physical form, a vague hatred comes up out of my own dark and I am certain that wherever in Europe there are minds strong enough to lead others the same vague hatred rises; in four or five or in less generations this hatred will have issued in violence and imposed some kind of rule of kindred. I cannot know the nature of that rule, for its opposite fills the light; all I can do to bring it nearer is to

intensify my hatred. I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons; State and Nation are the work of intellect, and when you consider what comes before and after them they are, as Victor Hugo said of something or other, not worth the blade of grass God gives for the nest of the linnet.⁴

19371961

Endnotes

- Note 7: Perhaps W. H. Auden (1907–1973) or C. Day-Lewis (1904–1972).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: London's underground railway. Lewis taught in the spa town of Cheltenham in the early 1930s. D. H. Lawrence lived in Capri and Sicily in the early 1920s.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Ezra Pound did this ca. 1910.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), French poet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Italian artist and inventor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Over Dublin's river Liffey.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Small finch. Victor Hugo (1802–1885), French writer.[Return to reference 4](#)

E. M. FORSTER

1879–1970

Born in London, Edward Morgan Forster was an infant when his father, an architect of Welsh extraction, died of consumption. An only child, Forster was raised by his paternal great-aunt and his mother, a member of a family distinguished over several generations for its evangelical religion and its philanthropic reformist activities. He was educated at Tonbridge School (the "Sawston" of his novel *The Longest Journey*), where he suffered from the cruelty of his classmates and other tribulations of being a day boy at a boarding school. As a student at King's College, Cambridge, he found an intellectual companionship that influenced his entire life. The friends he made were to become, with Forster, members of the Bloomsbury Group—so called because some of its prominent figures lived in the Bloomsbury district of London—which included the writers Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, the art historians Clive Bell and Roger Fry, and the economist John Maynard Keynes. Forster's main interest was always in personal relations, the "little society" we make for ourselves with our friends. He cast a wary eye on society at large, his point of view being that of the independent liberal, suspicious of political slogans and catchwords, critical of Victorian attitudes and British imperialism.

After graduating from Cambridge, Forster visited Greece and spent some time in Italy in 1901, and this experience influenced him permanently; throughout his life he tended to set Greek and Italian

peasant life in symbolic contrast to the stuffy and repressed life of middle-class England. Both Greek mythology and Italian Renaissance art opened up to him a world of vital exuberance, and most of his work is concerned with ways of discovering such a quality in personal relationships amid the complexities and distortions of modern life. He began writing as a contributor to the newly founded liberal *Independent Review* in 1903, and in 1905 published his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, a tragicomic projection of conflicts between refined English gentility and coarse Italian vitality.

Forster's second novel, *The Longest Journey* (1907), examines the differences between living and dead relationships with much incidental satire of English public-school education and English notions of respectability. *A Room with a View* (1908) explores the nature of love with a great deal of subtlety, using (as with his first novel) Italy as a liberating agent for the British tourists whom he also satirizes. *Howards End* (1910) involves a conflict between two families, one interested in art and literature and the other only in money and business, and probes the relation between inward feeling and outward action, between the kinds of reality in which people live. "Only connect!" exclaims one of the characters. "Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will soon be at its height." But no one knew better than Forster that this is more easily said than done and that false or premature connections, connections made by rule and not achieved through total realization of the personality, can destroy and corrupt.

A pacifist, Forster refused to fight in World War I and instead served in the International Red Cross in Egypt. In Alexandria he had his first significant sexual relationship, with Mohammed el Adl, an Egyptian tram conductor; he feared social disapproval less there than in England, where, not long after Oscar Wilde's infamous prosecution for homosexual offenses, he hid his personal life from public scrutiny.

He traveled to India in 1912 and 1922, and in his last (for Forster published no more fiction during his life) and best-known novel, *A Passage to India* (1924), he takes the fraught relations between

British and colonized Indians in the subcontinent as a background for the most searching and complex of all his explorations of the possibilities and limitations, the promises and pitfalls, of human relationships. Published posthumously was another novel, *Maurice*, written more than fifty years before and circulated privately during his life, in which he tried to define and do justice to homosexual love, which had played an important part in his life. In addition to fiction Forster wrote critical, autobiographical, and descriptive prose, notably *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), which, as a discussion of the techniques of fiction by a practicing novelist, has become a minor classic of criticism.

"The Machine Stops," a short story set in a dystopian future, concerns the relationship between a mother and her son who are separated by physical and philosophical distance. Included in Forster's collection *The Eternal Moment and Other Stories* (1928), this work may seem like a generic outlier in the author's oeuvre, but it is suffused with his signature skepticism of technological modernization as a solution to the problems of alienation and loneliness. The worldviews of the characters pit received knowledge against immediate experience and recall the divisions between exhaustion and vitality, material wealth and spiritual richness, that structure Forster's novels. Written as a criticism of the utopian tales of H. G. Wells, "The Machine Stops" poses classic questions about whether new technologies serve as tools for human liberation or inadvertent forms of imprisonment. While a meditation on the crises of modernity in Forster's own time, the story enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in 2020 for presenting a world that uncannily resembled life in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Machine Stops

Part 1. The Air-Ship

Imagine, if you can, a small room, hexagonal in shape, like the cell of a bee. It is lighted neither by window nor by lamp, yet it is filled with a soft radiance. There are no apertures for ventilation, yet the air is fresh. There are no musical instruments, and yet, at the moment that my meditation opens, this room is throbbing with melodious sounds. An arm-chair is in the centre, by its side a reading-desk—that is all the furniture. And in the arm-chair there sits a swaddled lump of flesh—a woman, about five feet high, with a face as white as a fungus. It is to her that the little room belongs.

An electric bell rang.

The woman touched a switch and the music was silent.

"I suppose I must see who it is," she thought, and set her chair in motion. The chair, like the music, was worked by machinery, and it rolled her to the other side of the room, where the bell still rang importunately.

"Who is it?" she called. Her voice was irritable, for she had been interrupted often since the music began. She knew several thousand people; in certain directions human intercourse had advanced enormously.

But when she listened into the receiver, her white face wrinkled into smiles, and she said:

"Very well. Let us talk, I will isolate myself. I do not expect anything important will happen for the next five minutes—for I can give you fully five minutes, Kuno. Then I must deliver my lecture on 'Music during the Australian Period.' "

She touched the isolation knob, so that no one else could speak to her. Then she touched the lighting apparatus, and the little room was plunged into darkness.

"Be quick!" she called, her irritation returning. "Be quick, Kuno; here I am in the dark wasting my time."

But it was fully fifteen seconds before the round plate that she held in her hands began to glow. A faint blue light shot across it,

darkening to purple, and presently she could see the image of her son, who lived on the other side of the earth, and he could see her.

"Kuno, how slow you are."

He smiled gravely.

"I really believe you enjoy dawdling."

"I have called you before, mother, but you were always busy or isolated. I have something particular to say."

"What is it, dearest boy? Be quick. Why could you not send it by pneumatic post?"¹

"Because I prefer saying such a thing. I want——"

"Well?"

"I want you to come and see me."

Vashti watched his face in the blue plate.

"But I can see you!" she exclaimed. "What more do you want?"

"I want to see you not through the Machine," said Kuno. "I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machine."

"Oh, hush!" said his mother, vaguely shocked. "You mustn't say anything against the Machine."

"Why not?"

"One mustn't."

"You talk as if a god had made the Machine," cried the other. "I believe that you pray to it when you are unhappy. Men made it, do not forget that. Great men, but men. The Machine is much, but it is not everything. I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you. That is why I want you to come. Come and stop with me. Pay me a visit, so that we can meet face to face, and talk about the hopes that are in my mind."

She replied that she could scarcely spare the time for a visit.

"The air-ship barely takes two days to fly between me and you."

"I dislike air-ships."

"Why?"

"I dislike seeing the horrible brown earth, and the sea, and the stars when it is dark. I get no ideas in an air-ship."

"I do not get them anywhere else."

"What kind of ideas can the air give you?"

He paused for an instant.

"Do you not know four big stars that form an oblong, and three stars close together in the middle of the oblong, and hanging from these stars, three other stars?"

"No, I do not. I dislike the stars. But did they give you an idea? How interesting; tell me."

"I had an idea that they were like a man."

"I do not understand."

"The four big stars are the man's shoulders and his knees. The three stars in the middle are like the belts that men wore once, and the three stars hanging are like a sword."²

"A sword?"

"Men carried swords about with them, to kill animals and other men."

"It does not strike me as a very good idea, but it is certainly original. When did it come to you first?"

"In the air-ship—" He broke off, and she fancied that he looked sad. She could not be sure, for the Machine did not transmit *nuances* of expression. It only gave a general idea of people—an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes, Vashti thought. The imponderable bloom, declared by a discredited philosophy to be the actual essence of intercourse, was rightly ignored by the Machine, just as the imponderable bloom of the grape was ignored by the manufacturers of artificial fruit. Something 'good enough' had long since been accepted by our race.

"The truth is," he continued, "that I want to see these stars again. They are curious stars. I want to see them not from the air-ship, but from the surface of the earth, as our ancestors did, thousands of years ago. I want to visit the surface of the earth."

She was shocked again.

"Mother, you must come, if only to explain to me what is the harm of visiting the surface of the earth."

"No harm," she replied, controlling herself. "But no advantage. The surface of the earth is only dust and mud, no life remains on it, and you would need a respirator, or the cold of the outer air would kill you. One dies immediately in the outer air."

"I know; of course I shall take all precautions."

"And besides——"

"Well?"

She considered, and chose her words with care. Her son had a queer temper, and she wished to dissuade him from the expedition.

"It is contrary to the spirit of the age," she asserted.

"Do you mean by that, contrary to the Machine?"

"In a sense, but——"

His image in the blue plate faded.

"Kuno!"

He had isolated himself.

For a moment Vashti felt lonely.

Then she generated the light, and the sight of her room, flooded with radiance and studded with electric buttons, revived her. There were buttons and switches everywhere—buttons to call for food, for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorized liquid. There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature. And there were of course the buttons by which she communicated with her friends. The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that she cared for in the world.

Vashti's next move was to turn off the isolation-switch, and all the accumulations of the last three minutes burst upon her. The room was filled with the noise of bells, and speaking-tubes. What was the new food like? Could she recommend it? Had she had any ideas lately? Might one tell her one's own ideas? Would she make an engagement to visit the public nurseries at an early date?—say this day month.

To most of these questions she replied with irritation—a growing quality in that accelerated age. She said that the new food was horrible. That she could not visit the public nurseries through press of engagements. That she had no ideas of her own but had just been told one—that four stars and three in the middle were like a man: she doubted there was much in it. Then she switched off her correspondents, for it was time to deliver her lecture on Australian music.

The clumsy system of public gatherings had been long since abandoned; neither Vashti nor her audience stirred from their rooms. Seated in her arm-chair she spoke, while they in their arm-chairs heard her, fairly well, and saw her, fairly well. She opened with a humorous account of music in the pre-Mongolian epoch, and went on to describe the great outburst of song that followed the Chinese conquest. Remote and primæval as were the methods of I-San-So and the Brisbane school, she yet felt (she said) that study of them might repay the musician of today: they had freshness; they had, above all, ideas.

Her lecture, which lasted ten minutes, was well received, and at its conclusion she and many of her audience listened to a lecture on the sea; there were ideas to be got from the sea; the speaker had donned a respirator and visited it lately. Then she fed, talked to many friends, had a bath, talked again, and summoned her bed.

The bed was not to her liking. It was too large, and she had a feeling for a small bed. Complaint was useless, for beds were of the same dimension all over the world, and to have had an alternative size would have involved vast alterations in the Machine. Vashti isolated herself—it was necessary, for neither day nor night existed under the ground—and reviewed all that had happened since she had summoned the bed last. Ideas? Scarcely any. Events—was Kuno's invitation an event?

By her side, on the little reading-desk, was a survival from the ages of litter—one book. This was the Book of the Machine. In it were instructions against every possible contingency. If she was hot or cold or dyspeptic or at a loss for a word, she went to the book,

and it told her which button to press. The Central Committee published it. In accordance with a growing habit, it was richly bound.

Sitting up in the bed, she took it reverently in her hands. She glanced round the glowing room as if some one might be watching her. Then, half ashamed, half joyful, she murmured "O Machine! O Machine!" and raised the volume to her lips. Thrice she kissed it, thrice inclined her head, thrice she felt the delirium of acquiescence. Her ritual performed, she turned to page 1367, which gave the times of the departure of the air-ships from the island in the southern hemisphere, under whose soil she lived, to the island in the northern hemisphere, whereunder lived her son.

She thought, "I have not the time."

She made the room dark and slept; she awoke and made the room light; she ate and exchanged ideas with her friends, and listened to music and attended lectures; she made the room dark and slept. Above her, beneath her, and around her, the Machine hummed eternally; she did not notice the noise, for she had been born with it in her ears. The earth, carrying her, hummed as it sped through silence, turning her now to the invisible sun, now to the invisible stars. She awoke and made the room light.

"Kuno!"

"I will not talk to you," he answered, "until you come."

"Have you been on the surface of the earth since we spoke last?"

His image faded.

Again she consulted the book. She became very nervous and lay back in her chair palpitating. Think of her as without teeth or hair. Presently she directed the chair to the wall, and pressed an unfamiliar button. The wall swung apart slowly. Through the opening she saw a tunnel that curved slightly, so that its goal was not visible. Should she go to see her son, here was the beginning of the journey.

Of course she knew all about the communication-system. There was nothing mysterious in it. She would summon a car and it would fly with her down the tunnel until it reached the lift that communicated with the air-ship station: the system had been in use

for many, many years, long before the universal establishment of the Machine. And of course she had studied the civilization that had immediately preceded her own—the civilization that had mistaken the functions of the system, and had used it for bringing people to things, instead of for bringing things to people. Those funny old days, when men went for change of air instead of changing the air in their rooms! And yet—she was frightened of the tunnel: she had not seen it since her last child was born. It curved—but not quite as she remembered; it was brilliant—but not quite as brilliant as a lecturer had suggested. Vashti was seized with the terrors of direct experience. She shrank back into the room, and the wall closed up again.

“Kuno,” she said, “I cannot come to see you. I am not well.”

Immediately an enormous apparatus fell on to her out of the ceiling, a thermometer was automatically inserted between her lips, a stethoscope was automatically laid upon her heart. She lay powerless. Cool pads soothed her forehead. Kuno had telegraphed to her doctor.

So the human passions still blundered up and down in the Machine. Vashti drank the medicine that the doctor projected into her mouth, and the machinery retired into the ceiling. The voice of Kuno was heard asking how she felt.

“Better.” Then with irritation: “But why do you not come to me instead?”

“Because I cannot leave this place.”

“Why?”

“Because, any moment, something tremendous may happen.”

“Have you been on the surface of the earth yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Then what is it?”

“I will not tell you through the Machine.”

She resumed her life.

But she thought of Kuno as a baby, his birth, his removal to the public nurseries, her one visit to him there, his visits to her—visits

which stopped when the Machine had assigned him a room on the other side of the earth. "Parents, duties of," said the book of the Machine, "cease at the moment of birth. P. 422327483." True, but there was something special about Kuno—indeed there had been something special about all her children—and, after all, she must brave the journey if he desired it. And "something tremendous might happen." What did that mean? The nonsense of a youthful man, no doubt, but she must go. Again she pressed the unfamiliar button, again the wall swung back, and she saw the tunnel that curved out of sight. Clasp the Book, she rose, tottered on to the platform, and summoned the car. Her room closed behind her: the journey to the northern hemisphere had begun.

Of course it was perfectly easy. The car approached and in it she found arm-chairs exactly like her own. When she signalled, it stopped, and she tottered into the lift. One other passenger was in the lift, the first fellow creature she had seen face to face for months. Few travelled in these days, for, thanks to the advance of science, the earth was exactly alike all over. Rapid intercourse, from which the previous civilization had hoped so much, had ended by defeating itself. What was the good of going to Pekin when it was just like Shrewsbury?³ Why return to Shrewsbury when it would be just like Pekin? Men seldom moved their bodies; all unrest was concentrated in the soul.

The air-ship service was a relic from the former age. It was kept up, because it was easier to keep it up than to stop it or to diminish it, but it now far exceeded the wants of the population. Vessel after vessel would rise from the vomitories of Rye or of Christchurch⁴ (I use the antique names), would sail into the crowded sky, and would draw up at the wharves of the south—empty. So nicely adjusted was the system, so independent of meteorology, that the sky, whether calm or cloudy, resembled a vast kaleidoscope whereon the same patterns periodically recurred. The ship on which Vashti sailed started now at sunset, now at dawn. But always, as it passed above Rheims, it would neighbour the ship that served between Helsingfors and the Brazils, and, every third time it surmounted the Alps, the

fleet of Palermo⁵ would cross its track behind. Night and day, wind and storm, tide and earthquake, impeded man no longer. He had harnessed Leviathan.⁶ All the old literature, with its praise of Nature, and its fear of Nature, rang false as the prattle of a child.

Yet as Vashti saw the vast flank of the ship, stained with exposure to the outer air, her horror of direct experience returned. It was not quite like the air-ship in the cinematophote. For one thing it smelt—not strongly or unpleasantly, but it did smell, and with her eyes shut she should have known that a new thing was close to her. Then she had to walk to it from the lift, had to submit to glances from the other passengers. The man in front dropped his Book—no great matter, but it disquieted them all. In the rooms, if the Book was dropped, the floor raised it mechanically, but the gangway to the air-ship was not so prepared, and the sacred volume lay motionless. They stopped—the thing was unforeseen—and the man, instead of picking up his property, felt the muscles of his arm to see how they had failed him. Then some one actually said with direct utterance: “We shall be late”—and they trooped on board, Vashti treading on the pages as she did so.

Inside, her anxiety increased. The arrangements were old-fashioned and rough. There was even a female attendant, to whom she would have to announce her wants during the voyage. Of course a revolving platform ran the length of the boat, but she was expected to walk from it to her cabin. Some cabins were better than others, and she did not get the best. She thought the attendant had been unfair, and spasms of rage shook her. The glass valves had closed, she could not go back. She saw, at the end of the vestibule, the lift in which she had ascended going quietly up and down, empty. Beneath those corridors of shining tiles were rooms, tier below tier, reaching far into the earth, and in each room there sat a human being, eating, or sleeping, or producing ideas. And buried deep in the hive was her own room. Vashti was afraid.

“O Machine! O Machine!” she murmured, and caressed her Book, and was comforted.

Then the sides of the vestibule seemed to melt together, as do the passages that we see in dreams, the lift vanished, the Book that had been dropped slid to the left and vanished, polished tiles rushed by like a stream of water, there was a slight jar, and the air-ship, issuing from its tunnel, soared above the waters of a tropical ocean.

It was night. For a moment she saw the coast of Sumatra⁷ edged by the phosphorescence of waves, and crowned by lighthouses, still sending forth their disregarded beams. These also vanished, and only the stars distracted her. They were not motionless, but swayed to and fro above her head, thronging out of one skylight into another, as if the universe and not the air-ship was careening. And, as often happens on clear nights, they seemed now to be in perspective, now on a plane; now piled tier beyond tier into the infinite heavens, now concealing infinity, a roof limiting for ever the visions of men. In either case they seemed intolerable. "Are we to travel in the dark?" called the passengers angrily, and the attendant, who had been careless, generated the light, and pulled down the blinds of pliable metal. When the air-ships had been built, the desire to look direct at things still lingered in the world. Hence the extraordinary number of skylights and windows, and the proportionate discomfort to those who were civilized and refined. Even in Vashti's cabin one star peeped through a flaw in the blind, and after a few hours' uneasy slumber, she was disturbed by an unfamiliar glow, which was the dawn.

Quick as the ship had sped westwards, the earth had rolled eastwards quicker still, and had dragged back Vashti and her companions towards the sun. Science could prolong the night, but only for a little, and those high hopes of neutralizing the earth's diurnal revolution⁸ had passed, together with hopes that were possibly higher. To "keep pace with the sun," or even to outstrip it, had been the aim of the civilization preceding this. Racing aeroplanes had been built for the purpose, capable of enormous speed, and steered by the greatest intellects of the epoch. Round the globe they went, round and round, westward, westward, round and round, amidst humanity's applause. In vain. The globe went

eastward quicker still, horrible accidents occurred, and the Committee of the Machine, at the time rising into prominence, declared the pursuit illegal, unmechanical, and punishable by Homelessness.

Of Homelessness more will be said later.

Doubtless the Committee was right. Yet the attempt to "defeat the sun" aroused the last common interest that our race experienced about the heavenly bodies, or indeed about anything. It was the last time that men were compacted by thinking of a power outside the world. The sun had conquered, yet it was the end of his spiritual dominion. Dawn, midday, twilight, the zodiacal path, touched neither men's lives nor their hearts, and science retreated into the ground, to concentrate herself upon problems that she was certain of solving.

So when Vashti found her cabin invaded by a rosy finger of light, she was annoyed, and tried to adjust the blind. But the blind flew up altogether, and she saw through the skylight small pink clouds, swaying against a background of blue, and as the sun crept higher, its radiance entered direct, brimming down the wall, like a golden sea. It rose and fell with the air-ship's motion, just as waves rise and fall, but it advanced steadily, as a tide advances. Unless she was careful, it would strike her face. A spasm of horror shook her and she rang for the attendant. The attendant too was horrified, but she could do nothing; it was not her place to mend the blind. She could only suggest that the lady should change her cabin, which she accordingly prepared to do.

People were almost exactly alike all over the world, but the attendant of the air-ship, perhaps owing to her exceptional duties, had grown a little out of the common. She had often to address passengers with direct speech, and this had given her a certain roughness and originality of manner. When Vashti swerved away from the sunbeams with a cry, she behaved barbarically—she put out her hand to steady her.

"How dare you!" exclaimed the passenger. "You forget yourself!"

The woman was confused, and apologized for not having let her fall. People never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machine.

"Where are we now?" asked Vashti haughtily.

"We are over Asia," said the attendant, anxious to be polite.

"Asia?"

"You must excuse my common way of speaking. I have got into the habit of calling places over which I pass by their unmechanical names."

"Oh, I remember Asia. The Mongols came from it."

"Beneath us, in the open air, stood a city that was once called Simla."⁹

"Have you ever heard of the Mongols and of the Brisbane school?"

"No."

"Brisbane also stood in the open air."

"Those mountains to the right—let me show you them." She pushed back a metal blind. The main chain of the Himalayas was revealed. "They were once called the Roof of the World, those mountains."

"What a foolish name!"

"You must remember that, before the dawn of civilization, they seemed to be an impenetrable wall that touched the stars. It was supposed that no one but the gods could exist above their summits. How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!"

"How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!" said Vashti.

"How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!" echoed the passenger who had dropped his Book the night before, and who was standing in the passage.

"And that white stuff in the cracks?—what is it?"

"I have forgotten its name."

"Cover the window, please. These mountains give me no ideas."

The northern aspect of the Himalayas was in deep shadow: on the Indian slope the sun had just prevailed. The forests had been

destroyed during the literature epoch for the purpose of making newspaper-pulp, but the snows were awakening to their morning glory, and clouds still hung on the breasts of Kinchinjunga.¹ In the plain were seen the ruins of cities, with diminished rivers creeping by their walls, and by the sides of these were sometimes the signs of vomitories, marking the cities of to-day. Over the whole prospect air-ships rushed, crossing and intercrossing with incredible *aplomb*, and rising nonchalantly when they desired to escape the perturbations of the lower atmosphere and to traverse the Roof of the World.

"We have indeed advanced, thanks to the Machine," repeated the attendant, and hid the Himalayas behind a metal blind.

The day dragged wearily forward. The passengers sat each in his cabin, avoiding one another with an almost physical repulsion and longing to be once more under the surface of the earth. There were eight or ten of them, mostly young males, sent out from the public nurseries to inhabit the rooms of those who had died in various parts of the earth. The man who had dropped his Book was on the homeward journey. He had been sent to Sumatra for the purpose of propagating the race. Vashti alone was travelling by her private will.

At midday she took a second glance at the earth. The air-ship was crossing another range of mountains, but she could see little, owing to clouds. Masses of black rock hovered below her, and merged indistinctly into grey. Their shapes were fantastic; one of them resembled a prostrate man.

"No ideas here," murmured Vashti, and hid the Caucasus² behind a metal blind.

In the evening she looked again. They were crossing a golden sea, in which lay many small islands and one peninsula.

She repeated, "No ideas here," and hid Greece behind a metal blind.

Endnotes

- Note 1: A replacement for the telegraph; large cities like New York experimented with sending messages propelled by compressed air through a series of underground tubes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The constellation of Orion.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: City in the United Kingdom and birthplace of Charles Darwin. "Pekin": historical English spelling of the city of Beijing, China.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: City in New Zealand. "Rye": city in New York, United States.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: City in Italy. "Rheims": city in France. "Helsingfors": Swedish name for Helsinki, Finland.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In theology and mythology, a monstrous sea serpent representing chaos; later used as a term for whales or sea monsters in general.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Island in Indonesia.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A planet turning on its axis, with one full turn being a full revolution, or one day.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Former name of Shimla, city in India near the Himalayan mountain range.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Alternate spelling of *Kangchenjunga*, the third-highest mountain in the world; it was thought to be the highest mountain until 1852.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.[Return to reference 2](#)

Part II. The Mending Apparatus

By a vestibule, by a lift, by a tubular railway, by a platform, by a sliding door—by reversing all the steps of her departure did Vashti arrive at her son's room, which exactly resembled her own. She might well declare that the visit was superfluous. The buttons, the knobs, the reading-desk with the Book, the temperature, the atmosphere, the illumination—all were exactly the same. And if Kuno himself, flesh of her flesh, stood close beside her at last, what profit was there in that? She was too well-bred to shake him by the hand.

Averting her eyes, she spoke as follows:

"Here I am. I have had the most terrible journey and greatly retarded the development of my soul. It is not worth it, Kuno, it is not worth it. My time is too precious. The sunlight almost touched me, and I have met with the rudest people. I can only stop a few minutes. Say what you want to say, and then I must return."

"I have been threatened with Homelessness," said Kuno.

She looked at him now.

"I have been threatened with Homelessness, and I could not tell you such a thing through the Machine."

Homelessness means death. The victim is exposed to the air, which kills him.

"I have been outside since I spoke to you last. The tremendous thing has happened, and they have discovered me."

"But why shouldn't you go outside?" she exclaimed. "It is perfectly legal, perfectly mechanical, to visit the surface of the earth. I have lately been to a lecture on the sea; there is no objection to that; one simply summons a respirator and gets an Egression-permit. It is not the kind of thing that spiritually-minded people do, and I begged you not to do it, but there is no legal objection to it."

"I did not get an Egression-permit."

"Then how did you get out?"

"I found out a way of my own."

The phrase conveyed no meaning to her, and he had to repeat it.

"A way of your own?" she whispered. "But that would be wrong."
"Why?"

The question shocked her beyond measure.

"You are beginning to worship the Machine," he said coldly. "You think it irreligious of me to have found out a way of my own. It was just what the Committee thought, when they threatened me with Homelessness."

At this she grew angry. "I worship nothing!" she cried. "I am most advanced. I don't think you irreligious, for there is no such thing as religion left. All the fear and the superstition that existed once have been destroyed by the Machine. I only meant that to find out a way of your own was—Besides, there is no new way out."

"So it is always supposed."

"Except through the vomitories, for which one must have an Egression-permit, it is impossible to get out. The Book says so."

"Well, the Book's wrong, for I have been out on my feet."

For Kuno was possessed of a certain physical strength.

By these days it was a demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth, and all who promised undue strength were destroyed. Humanitarians may protest, but it would have been no true kindness to let an athlete live; he would never have been happy in that state of life to which the Machine had called him; he would have yearned for trees to climb, rivers to bathe in, meadows and hills against which he might measure his body. Man must be adapted to his surroundings, must he not? In the dawn of the world our weakly must be exposed on Mount Taygetus³ in its twilight our strong will suffer euthanasia, that the Machine may progress, that the Machine may progress, that the Machine may progress eternally.

"You know that we have lost the sense of space. We say 'space is annihilated,' but we have annihilated not space, but the sense thereof. We have lost a part of ourselves. I determined to recover it, and I began by walking up and down the platform of the railway outside my room. Up and down, until I was tired, and so did recapture the meaning of 'Near' and 'Far.' 'Near' is a place to which I can get quickly *on my feet*, not a place to which the train or the air-

ship will take me quickly. 'Far' is a place to which I cannot get quickly on my feet; the vomitory is 'far,' though I could be there in thirty-eight seconds by summoning the train. Man is the measure. That was my first lesson. Man's feet are the measure for distance, his hands are the measure for ownership, his body is the measure for all that is lovable and desirable and strong. Then I went further: it was then that I called to you for the first time, and you would not come.

"This city, as you know, is built deep beneath the surface of the earth, with only the vomitories protruding. Having paced the platform outside my own room, I took the lift to the next platform and paced that also, and so with each in turn, until I came to the topmost, above which begins the earth. All the platforms were exactly alike, and all that I gained by visiting them was to develop my sense of space and my muscles. I think I should have been content with this—it is not a little thing,—but as I walked and brooded, it occurred to me that our cities had been built in the days when men still breathed the outer air, and that there had been ventilation shafts for the workmen. I could think of nothing but these ventilation shafts. Had they been destroyed by all the food-tubes and medicine-tubes and music-tubes that the Machine has evolved lately? Or did traces of them remain? One thing was certain. If I came upon them anywhere, it would be in the railway-tunnels of the topmost story. Everywhere else, all space was accounted for.

"I am telling my story quickly, but don't think that I was not a coward or that your answers never depressed me. It is not the proper thing, it is not mechanical, it is not decent to walk along a railway-tunnel. I did not fear that I might tread upon a live rail and be killed. I feared something far more intangible—doing what was not contemplated by the Machine. Then I said to myself, 'Man is the measure,' and I went, and after many visits I found an opening.

"The tunnels, of course, were lighted. Everything is light, artificial light; darkness is the exception. So when I saw a black gap in the tiles, I knew that it was an exception, and rejoiced. I put in my arm—I could put in no more at first—and waved it round and round in

ecstasy. I loosened another tile, and put in my head, and shouted into the darkness: 'I am coming, I shall do it yet,' and my voice reverberated down endless passages. I seemed to hear the spirits of those dead workmen who had returned each evening to the starlight and to their wives, and all the generations who had lived in the open air called back to me, 'You will do it yet, you are coming.' "

He paused, and, absurd as he was, his last words moved her. For Kuno had lately asked to be a father, and his request had been refused by the Committee. His was not a type that the Machine desired to hand on.

"Then a train passed. It brushed by me, but I thrust my head and arms into the hole. I had done enough for one day, so I crawled back to the platform, went down in the lift, and summoned my bed. Ah what dreams! And again I called you, and again you refused."

She shook her head and said:

"Don't. Don't talk of these terrible things. You make me miserable. You are throwing civilization away."

"But I had got back the sense of space and a man cannot rest then. I determined to get in at the hole and climb the shaft. And so I exercised my arms. Day after day I went through ridiculous movements, until my flesh ached, and I could hang by my hands and hold the pillow of my bed outstretched for many minutes. Then I summoned a respirator, and started.

"It was easy at first. The mortar had somehow rotted, and I soon pushed some more tiles in, and clambered after them into the darkness, and the spirits of the dead comforted me. I don't know what I mean by that. I just say what I felt. I felt, for the first time, that a protest had been lodged against corruption, and that even as the dead were comforting me, so I was comforting the unborn. I felt that humanity existed, and that it existed without clothes. How can I possibly explain this? It was naked, humanity seemed naked, and all these tubes and buttons and machineries neither came into the world with us, nor will they follow us out, nor do they matter supremely while we are here. Had I been strong, I would have torn off every garment I had, and gone out into the outer air

unswaddled. But this is not for me, nor perhaps for my generation. I climbed with my respirator and my hygienic clothes and my dietetic tabloids!⁴ Better thus than not at all.

"There was a ladder, made of some primæval metal. The light from the railway fell upon its lowest rungs, and I saw that it led straight upwards out of the rubble at the bottom of the shaft. Perhaps our ancestors ran up and down it a dozen times daily, in their building. As I climbed, the rough edges cut through my gloves so that my hands bled. The light helped me for a little, and then came darkness and, worse still, silence which pierced my ears like a sword. The Machine hums! Did you know that? Its hum penetrates our blood, and may even guide our thoughts. Who knows! I was getting beyond its power. Then I thought: 'This silence means that I am doing wrong.' But I heard voices in the silence, and again they strengthened me." He laughed. "I had need of them. The next moment I cracked my head against something."

She sighed.

"I had reached one of those pneumatic stoppers that defend us from the outer air. You may have noticed them on the air-ship. Pitch dark, my feet on the rungs of an invisible ladder, my hands cut; I cannot explain how I lived through this part, but the voices still comforted me, and I felt for fastenings. The stopper, I suppose, was about eight feet across. I passed my hand over it as far as I could reach. It was perfectly smooth. I felt it almost to the centre. Not quite to the centre, for my arm was too short. Then the voice said: 'Jump. It is worth it. There may be a handle in the centre, and you may catch hold of it and so come to us your own way. And if there is no handle, so that you may fall and are dashed to pieces—it is still worth it: you will still come to us your own way.' So I jumped. There was a handle, and——"

He paused. Tears gathered in his mother's eyes. She knew that he was fated. If he did not die to-day he would die to-morrow. There was not room for such a person in the world. And with her pity disgust mingled. She was ashamed at having borne such a son, she who had always been so respectable and so full of ideas. Was he

really the little boy to whom she had taught the use of his stops and buttons, and to whom she had given his first lessons in the Book? The very hair that disfigured his lip showed that he was reverting to some savage type. On atavism the Machine can have no mercy.

"There was a handle, and I did catch it. I hung tranced over the darkness and heard the hum of these workings as the last whisper in a dying dream. All the things I had cared about and all the people I had spoken to through tubes appeared infinitely little. Meanwhile the handle revolved. My weight had set something in motion and I span slowly, and then——

"I cannot describe it. I was lying with my face to the sunshine. Blood poured from my nose and ears and I heard a tremendous roaring. The stopper, with me clinging to it, had simply been blown out of the earth, and the air that we make down here was escaping through the vent into the air above. It burst up like a fountain. I crawled back to it—for the upper air hurts—and, as it were, I took great sips from the edge. My respirator had flown goodness knows where, my clothes were torn. I just lay with my lips close to the hole, and I sipped until the bleeding stopped. You can imagine nothing so curious. This hollow in the grass—I will speak of it in a minute,—the sun shining into it, not brilliantly but through marbled clouds,—the peace, the nonchalance, the sense of space, and, brushing my cheek, the roaring fountain of our artificial air! Soon I spied my respirator, bobbing up and down in the current high above my head, and higher still were many air-ships. But no one ever looks out of air-ships, and in any case they could not have picked me up. There I was, stranded. The sun shone a little way down the shaft, and revealed the topmost rung of the ladder, but it was hopeless trying to reach it. I should either have been tossed up again by the escape, or else have fallen in, and died. I could only lie on the grass, sipping and sipping, and from time to time glancing around me.

"I knew that I was in Wessex,⁵ for I had taken care to go to a lecture on the subject before starting. Wessex lies above the room in which we are talking now. It was once an important state. Its kings held all the southern coast from the Andredswald to Cornwall, while

the Wansdyke⁶ protected them on the north, running over the high ground. The lecturer was only concerned with the rise of Wessex, so I do not know how long it remained an international power, nor would the knowledge have assisted me. To tell the truth I could do nothing but laugh, during this part. There was I, with a pneumatic stopper by my side and a respirator bobbing over my head, imprisoned, all three of us, in a grass-grown hollow that was edged with fern."

Then he grew grave again.

"Lucky for me that it was a hollow. For the air began to fall back into it and to fill it as water fills a bowl. I could crawl about. Presently I stood. I breathed a mixture, in which the air that hurts predominated whenever I tried to climb the sides. This was not so bad. I had not lost my tabloids and remained ridiculously cheerful, and as for the Machine, I forgot about it altogether. My one aim now was to get to the top, where the ferns were, and to view whatever objects lay beyond.

"I rushed the slope. The new air was still too bitter for me and I came rolling back, after a momentary vision of something grey. The sun grew very feeble, and I remembered that he was in Scorpio⁷—I had been to a lecture on that too. If the sun is in Scorpio and you are in Wessex, it means that you must be as quick as you can, or it will get too dark. (This is the first bit of useful information I have ever got from a lecture, and I expect it will be the last.) It made me try frantically to breathe the new air, and to advance as far as I dared out of my pond. The hollow filled so slowly. At times I thought that the fountain played with less vigour. My respirator seemed to dance nearer the earth; the roar was decreasing."

He broke off.

"I don't think this is interesting you. The rest will interest you even less. There are no ideas in it, and I wish that I had not troubled you to come. We are too different, mother."

She told him to continue.

"It was evening before I climbed the bank. The sun had very nearly slipped out of the sky by this time, and I could not get a good

view. You, who have just crossed the Roof of the World, will not want to hear an account of the little hills that I saw—low colourless hills. But to me they were living and the turf that covered them was a skin, under which their muscles rippled, and I felt that those hills had called with incalculable force to men in the past, and that men had loved them. Now they sleep—perhaps for ever. They commune with humanity in dreams. Happy the man, happy the woman, who awakes the hills of Wessex. For though they sleep, they will never die.”

His voice rose passionately.

“Cannot you see, cannot all your lecturers see, that it is we that are dying, and that down here the only thing that really lives is the Machine? We created the Machine, to do our will, but we cannot make it do our will now. It has robbed us of the sense of space and of the sense of touch, it has blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralysed our bodies and our wills, and now it compels us to worship it. The Machine develops—but not on our lines. The Machine proceeds—but not to our goal. We only exist as the blood corpuscles that course through its arteries, and if it could work without us, it would let us die. Oh, I have no remedy—or, at least, only one—to tell men again and again that I have seen the hills of Wessex as Ælfrid⁸ saw them when he overthrew the Danes.

“So the sun set. I forgot to mention that a belt of mist lay between my hill and other hills, and that it was the colour of pearl.”

He broke off for the second time.

“Go on,” said his mother wearily.

He shook his head.

“Go on. Nothing that you say can distress me now. I am hardened.”

“I had meant to tell you the rest, but I cannot: I know that I cannot: good-bye.”

Vashti stood irresolute. All her nerves were tingling with his blasphemies. But she was also inquisitive.

"This is unfair," she complained. "You have called me across the world to hear your story, and hear it I will. Tell me—as briefly as possible, for this is a disastrous waste of time—tell me how you returned to civilization."

"Oh—that!" he said, starting. "You would like to hear about civilization. Certainly. Had I got to where my respirator fell down?"

"No—but I understand everything now. You put on your respirator, and managed to walk along the surface of the earth to a vomitory, and there your conduct was reported to the Central Committee."

"By no means."

He passed his hand over his forehead, as if dispelling some strong impression. Then, resuming his narrative, he warmed to it again.

"My respirator fell about sunset. I had mentioned that the fountain seemed feebler, had I not?"

"Yes."

"About sunset, it let the respirator fall. As I said, I had entirely forgotten about the Machine, and I paid no great attention at the time, being occupied with other things. I had my pool of air, into which I could dip when the outer keenness became intolerable, and which would possibly remain for days, provided that no wind sprang up to disperse it. Not until it was too late did I realize what the stoppage of the escape implied. You see—the gap in the tunnel had been mended; the Mending Apparatus; the Mending Apparatus, was after me.

"One other warning I had, but I neglected it. The sky at night was clearer than it had been in the day, and the moon, which was about half the sky behind the sun, shone into the dell at moments quite brightly. I was in my usual place—on the boundary between the two atmospheres—when I thought I saw something dark move across the bottom of the dell, and vanish into the shaft. In my folly, I ran down. I bent over and listened, and I thought I heard a faint scraping noise in the depths.

"At this—but it was too late—I took alarm. I determined to put on my respirator and to walk right out of the dell. But my respirator had gone. I knew exactly where it had fallen—between the stopper and the aperture—and I could even feel the mark that it had made in the turf. It had gone, and I realized that something evil was at work, and I had better escape to the other air, and, if I must die, die running towards the cloud that had been the colour of a pearl. I never started. Out of the shaft—it is too horrible. A worm, a long white worm, had crawled out of the shaft and was gliding over the moonlit grass.

"I screamed. I did everything that I should not have done, I stamped upon the creature instead of flying from it, and it at once curled round the ankle. Then we fought. The worm let me run all over the dell, but edged up my leg as I ran. 'Help!' I cried. (That part is too awful. It belongs to the part that you will never know.) 'Help!' I cried. (Why cannot we suffer in silence?) 'Help!' I cried. Then my feet were wound together, I fell, I was dragged away from the dear ferns and the living hills, and past the great metal stopper (I can tell you this part), and I thought it might save me again if I caught hold of the handle. It also was enwrapped, it also. Oh, the whole dell was full of the things. They were searching it in all directions, they were denuding it, and the white snouts of others peeped out of the hole, ready if needed. Everything that could be moved they brought—brushwood, bundles of fern, everything, and down we all went intertwined into hell. The last things that I saw, ere the stopper closed after us, were certain stars, and I felt that a man of my sort lived in the sky. For I did fight, I fought till the very end, and it was only my head hitting against the ladder that quieted me. I woke up in this room. The worms had vanished. I was surrounded by artificial air, artificial light, artificial peace, and my friends were calling to me down speaking-tubes to know whether I had come across any new ideas lately."

Here his story ended. Discussion of it was impossible, and Vashti turned to go.

"It will end in Homelessness," she said quietly.

"I wish it would," retorted Kuno.

"The Machine has been most merciful."

"I prefer the mercy of God."

"By that superstitious phrase, do you mean that you could live in the outer air?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen, round the vomitories, the bones of those who were extruded after the Great Rebellion?"

"Yes."

"They were left where they perished for our edification. A few crawled away, but they perished, too—who can doubt it? And so with the Homeless of our own day. The surface of the earth supports life no longer."

"Indeed."

"Ferns and a little grass may survive, but all higher forms have perished. Has any airship detected them?"

"No."

"Has any lecturer dealt with them?"

"No."

"Then why this obstinacy?"

"Because I have seen them," he exploded.

"Seen *what*?"

"Because I have seen her in the twilight—because she came to my help when I called—because she, too, was entangled by the worms, and, luckier than I, was killed by one of them piercing her throat."

He was mad. Vashti departed, nor, in the troubles that followed, did she ever see his face again.

Endnotes

- Note 3: Highest mountain of the Taygetus mountain range in Greece. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Medicine sold in tablets. [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Term for a region in southern Britain that was previously a medieval kingdom.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Early medieval embankment and ditch used for defensive purposes. "Andredswald": Saxon word for the Andred forest. "Cornwall": historic kingdom that bordered Wessex.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Astrological zodiac sign. In the common Western zodiac, the sun is in this region of the sky from late October to late November, when the days are shorter.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Ninth-century king of Wessex who defended the region against Danish invaders.[Return to reference 8](#)

Part III. The Homeless

During the years that followed Kuno's escapade, two important developments took place in the Machine. On the surface they were revolutionary, but in either case men's minds had been prepared beforehand, and they did but express tendencies that were latent already.

The first of these was the abolition of respirators.

Advanced thinkers, like Vashti, had always held it foolish to visit the surface of the earth. Air-ships might be necessary, but what was the good of going out for mere curiosity and crawling along for a mile or two in a terrestrial motor? The habit was vulgar and perhaps faintly improper: it was unproductive of ideas, and had no connection with the habits that really mattered. So respirators were abolished, and with them, of course, the terrestrial motors, and except for a few lecturers, who complained that they were debarred access to their subject-matter, the development was accepted quietly. Those who still wanted to know what the earth was like had after all only to listen to some gramophone, or to look into some cinematophote. And even the lecturers acquiesced when they found that a lecture on the sea was none the less stimulating when compiled out of other lectures that had already been delivered on the same subject. "Beware of first-hand ideas!" exclaimed one of the most advanced of them. "First-hand ideas do not really exist. They are but the physical impressions produced by love and fear, and on this gross foundation who could erect a philosophy? Let your ideas be second-hand, and if possible tenth-hand, for then they will be far removed from that disturbing element—direct observation. Do not learn anything about this subject of mine—the French Revolution. Learn instead what I think that Enicharmon thought Urizen thought Gutch thought Ho-Yung thought Chi-Bo-Sing thought Lafcadio Hearn thought Carlyle thought Mirabeau said about the French Revolution.⁹ Through the medium of these ten great minds, the blood that was shed at Paris and the windows that were broken at Versailles will be clarified to an idea which you may employ most profitably in your

daily lives. But be sure that the intermediates are many and varied, for in history one authority exists to counteract another. Urizen must counteract the scepticism of Ho-Yung and Enicharmon, I must myself counteract the impetuosity of Gutch. You who listen to me are in a better position to judge about the French Revolution than I am. Your descendants will be even in a better position than you, for they will learn what you think I think, and yet another intermediate will be added to the chain. And in time"—his voice rose—"there will come a generation that has got beyond facts, beyond impressions, a generation absolutely colourless, a generation

`seraphically free
From taint of personality,¹

which will see the French Revolution not as it happened, nor as they would like it to have happened, but as it would have happened, had it taken place in the days of the Machine."

Tremendous applause greeted this lecture, which did but voice a feeling already latent in the minds of men—a feeling that terrestrial facts must be ignored, and that the abolition of respirators was a positive gain. It was even suggested that air-ships should be abolished too. This was not done, because air-ships had somehow worked themselves into the Machine's system. But year by year they were used less, and mentioned less by thoughtful men.

The second great development was the reestablishment of religion.

This, too, had been voiced in the celebrated lecture. No one could mistake the reverent tone in which the peroration had concluded, and it awakened a responsive echo in the heart of each. Those who had long worshipped silently, now began to talk. They described the strange feeling of peace that came over them when they handled the Book of the Machine, the pleasure that it was to repeat certain numerals out of it, however little meaning those numerals conveyed to the outward ear, the ecstasy of touching a

button, however unimportant, or of ringing an electric bell, however superfluously.

"The Machine," they exclaimed, "feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we speak to one another, through it we see one another, in it we have our being. The Machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition: the Machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the Machine." And before long this allocution was printed on the first page of the Book, and in subsequent editions the ritual swelled into a complicated system of praise and prayer. The word "religion" was sedulously avoided, and in theory the Machine was still the creation and the implement of man. But in practice all, save a few retrogrades, worshipped it as divine. Nor was it worshipped in unity. One believer would be chiefly impressed by the blue optic plates, through which he saw other believers; another by the mending apparatus, which sinful Kuno had compared to worms; another by the lifts, another by the Book. And each would pray to this or to that, and ask it to intercede for him with the Machine as a whole. Persecution—that also was present. It did not break out, for reasons that will be set forward shortly. But it was latent, and all who did not accept the minimum known as "undenominational Mechanism" lived in danger of Homelessness, which means death, as we know.

To attribute these two great developments to the Central Committee, is to take a very narrow view of civilization. The Central Committee announced the developments, it is true, but they were no more the cause of them than were the kings of the imperialistic period the cause of war. Rather did they yield to some invincible pressure, which came no one knew whither, and which, when gratified, was succeeded by some new pressure equally invincible. To such a state of affairs it is convenient to give the name of progress. No one confessed the Machine was out of hand. Year by year it was served with increased efficiency and decreased intelligence. The better a man knew his own duties upon it, the less he understood the duties of his neighbour, and in all the world there was not one who understood the monster as a whole. Those master

brains had perished. They had left full directions, it is true, and their successors had each of them mastered a portion of those directions. But Humanity, in its desire for comfort, had over-reached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean the progress of the Machine.

As for Vashti, her life went peacefully forward until the final disaster. She made her room dark and slept; she awoke and made the room light. She lectured and attended lectures. She exchanged ideas with her innumerable friends and believed she was growing more spiritual. At times a friend was granted Euthanasia, and left his or her room for the homelessness that is beyond all human conception. Vashti did not much mind. After an unsuccessful lecture, she would sometimes ask for Euthanasia herself. But the death-rate was not permitted to exceed the birth-rate, and the Machine had hitherto refused it to her.

The troubles began quietly, long before she was conscious of them.

One day she was astonished at receiving a message from her son. They never communicated, having nothing in common, and she had only heard indirectly that he was still alive, and had been transferred from the northern hemisphere, where he had behaved so mischievously, to the southern—indeed, to a room not far from her own.

"Does he want me to visit him?" she thought. "Never again, never. And I have not the time."

No, it was madness of another kind.

He refused to visualize his face upon the blue plate, and speaking out of the darkness with solemnity said:

"The Machine stops."

"What do you say?"

"The Machine is stopping, I know it, I know the signs."

She burst into a peal of laughter. He heard her and was angry, and they spoke no more.

"Can you imagine anything more absurd?" she cried to a friend. "A man who was my son believes that the Machine is stopping. It would be impious if it was not mad."

"The Machine is stopping?" her friend replied. "What does that mean? The phrase conveys nothing to me."

"Nor to me."

"He does not refer, I suppose, to the trouble there has been lately with the music?"

"Oh no, of course not. Let us talk about music."

"Have you complained to the authorities?"

"Yes, and they say it wants mending, and referred me to the Committee of the Mending Apparatus. I complained of those curious gasping sighs that disfigure the symphonies of the Brisbane school. They sound like some one in pain. The Committee of the Mending Apparatus say that it shall be remedied shortly."

Obscurely worried, she resumed her life. For one thing, the defect in the music irritated her. For another thing, she could not forget Kuno's speech. If he had known that the music was out of repair—he could not know it, for he detested music—if he had known that it was wrong, "the Machine stops" was exactly the venomous sort of remark he would have made. Of course he had made it at a venture, but the coincidence annoyed her, and she spoke with some petulance to the Committee of the Mending Apparatus.

They replied, as before, that the defect would be set right shortly.

"Shortly! At once!" she retorted. "Why should I be worried by imperfect music? Things are always put right at once. If you do not mend it at once, I shall complain to the Central Committee."

"No personal complaints are received by the Central Committee," the Committee of the Mending Apparatus replied.

"Through whom am I to make my complaint, then?"

"Through us."

"I complain then."

"Your complaint shall be forwarded in its turn."

"Have others complained?"

This question was unmechanical, and the Committee of the Mending Apparatus refused to answer it.

"It is too bad!" she exclaimed to another of her friends. "There never was such an unfortunate woman as myself. I can never be sure of my music now. It gets worse and worse each time I summon it."

"I too have my troubles," the friend replied. "Sometimes my ideas are interrupted by a slight jarring noise."

"What is it?"

"I do not know whether it is inside my head, or inside the wall."

"Complain, in either case."

"I have complained, and my complaint will be forwarded in its turn to the Central Committee."

Time passed, and they resented the defects no longer. The defects had not been remedied, but the human tissues in that latter day had become so subservient, that they readily adapted themselves to every caprice of the Machine. The sigh at the crisis of the Brisbane symphony no longer irritated Vashti; she accepted it as part of the melody. The jarring noise, whether in the head or in the wall, was no longer resented by her friend. And so with the mouldy artificial fruit, so with the bath water that began to stink, so with the defective rhymes that the poetry machine had taken to emit. All were bitterly complained of at first, and then acquiesced in and forgotten. Things went from bad to worse unchallenged.

It was otherwise with the failure of the sleeping apparatus. That was a more serious stoppage. There came a day when over the whole world—in Sumatra, in Wessex, in the innumerable cities of Courland² and Brazil—the beds, when summoned by their tired owners, failed to appear. It may seem a ludicrous matter, but from it we may date the collapse of humanity. The Committee responsible for the failure was assailed by complainants, whom it referred, as usual, to the Committee of the Mending Apparatus, who in its turn assured them that their complaints would be forwarded to the

Central Committee. But the discontent grew, for mankind was not yet sufficiently adaptable to do without sleeping.

"Some one is meddling with the Machine——" they began.

"Some one is trying to make himself king, to reintroduce the personal element."

"Punish that man with Homelessness."

"To the rescue! Avenge the Machine! Avenge the Machine!"

"War! Kill the man!"

But the Committee of the Mending Apparatus now came forward, and allayed the panic with well-chosen words. It confessed that the Mending Apparatus was itself in need of repair.

The effect of this frank confession was admirable.

"Of course," said a famous lecturer—he of the French Revolution, who gilded each new decay with splendour—"of course we shall not press our complaints now. The Mending Apparatus has treated us so well in the past that we all sympathize with it, and will wait patiently for its recovery. In its own good time it will resume its duties. Meanwhile let us do without our beds, our tabloids, our other little wants. Such, I feel sure, would be the wish of the Machine."

Thousands of miles away his audience applauded. The Machine still linked them. Under the seas, beneath the roots of the mountains, ran the wires through which they saw and heard, the enormous eyes and ears that were their heritage, and the hum of many workings clothed their thoughts in one garment of subserviency. Only the old and the sick remained ungrateful, for it was rumoured that Euthanasia, too, was out of order, and that pain had reappeared among men.

It became difficult to read. A blight entered the atmosphere and dulled its luminosity. At times Vashti could scarcely see across her room. The air, too, was foul. Loud were the complaints, impotent the remedies, heroic the tone of the lecturer as he cried: "Courage! courage! What matter so long as the Machine goes on? To it the darkness and the light are one." And though things improved again after a time, the old brilliancy was never recaptured, and humanity never recovered from its entrance into twilight. There was an

hysterical talk of “measures,” of “provisional dictatorship,” and the inhabitants of Sumatra were asked to familiarize themselves with the workings of the central power station, the said power station being situated in France. But for the most part panic reigned, and men spent their strength praying to their Books, tangible proofs of the Machine’s omnipotence. There were gradations of terror—at times came rumours of hope—the Mending Apparatus was almost mended—the enemies of the Machine had been got under—new “nerve-centres” were evolving which would do the work even more magnificently than before. But there came a day when, without the slightest warning, without any previous hint of feebleness, the entire communication-system broke down, all over the world, and the world, as they understood it, ended.

Vashti was lecturing at the time and her earlier remarks had been punctuated with applause. As she proceeded the audience became silent, and at the conclusion there was no sound. Somewhat displeased, she called to a friend who was a specialist in sympathy. No sound: doubtless the friend was sleeping. And so with the next friend whom she tried to summon, and so with the next, until she remembered Kuno’s cryptic remark, “The Machine stops.”

The phrase still conveyed nothing. If Eternity was stopping it would of course be set going shortly.

For example, there was still a little light and air—the atmosphere had improved a few hours previously. There was still the Book, and while there was the Book there was security.

Then she broke down, for with the cessation of activity came an unexpected terror—silence.

She had never known silence, and the coming of it nearly killed her—it did kill many thousands of people outright. Ever since her birth she had been surrounded by the steady hum. It was to the ear what artificial air was to the lungs, and agonizing pains shot across her head. And scarcely knowing what she did, she stumbled forward and pressed the unfamiliar button, the one that opened the door of her cell.

Now the door of the cell worked on a simple hinge of its own. It was not connected with the central power station, dying far away in France. It opened, rousing immoderate hopes in Vashti, for she thought that the Machine had been mended. It opened, and she saw the dim tunnel that curved far away towards freedom. One look, and then she shrank back. For the tunnel was full of people—she was almost the last in that city to have taken alarm.

People at any time repelled her, and these were nightmares from her worst dreams. People were crawling about, people were screaming, whimpering, gasping for breath, touching each other, vanishing in the dark, and ever and anon being pushed off the platform on to the live rail. Some were fighting round the electric bells, trying to summon trains which could not be summoned. Others were yelling for Euthanasia or for respirators, or blaspheming the Machine. Others stood at the doors of their cells fearing, like herself, either to stop in them or to leave them. And behind all the uproar was silence—the silence which is the voice of the earth and of the generations who have gone.

No—it was worse than solitude. She closed the door again and sat down to wait for the end. The disintegration went on, accompanied by horrible cracks and rumbling. The valves that restrained the Medical Apparatus must have been weakened, for it ruptured and hung hideously from the ceiling. The floor heaved and fell and flung her from her chair. A tube oozed towards her serpent fashion. And at last the final horror approached—light began to ebb, and she knew that civilization's long day was closing.

She whirled round, praying to be saved from this, at any rate, kissing the Book, pressing button after button. The uproar outside was increasing, and even penetrated the wall. Slowly the brilliancy of her cell was dimmed, the reflections faded from her metal switches. Now she could not see the reading-stand, now not the Book, though she held it in her hand. Light followed the flight of sound, air was following light, and the original void returned to the cavern from which it had been so long excluded. Vashti continued to whirl, like

the devotees of an earlier religion, screaming, praying, striking at the buttons with bleeding hands.

It was thus that she opened her prison and escaped—escaped in the spirit: at least so it seems to me, ere my meditation closes. That she escapes in the body—I cannot perceive that. She struck, by chance, the switch that released the door, and the rush of foul air on her skin, the loud throbbing whispers in her ears, told her that she was facing the tunnel again, and that tremendous platform on which she had seen men fighting. They were not fighting now. Only the whispers remained, and the little whimpering groans. They were dying by hundreds out in the dark.

She burst into tears.

Tears answered her.

They wept for humanity, those two, not for themselves. They could not bear that this should be the end. Ere silence was completed their hearts were opened, and they knew what had been important on the earth. Man, the flower of all flesh, the noblest of all creatures visible, man who had once made god in his image, and had mirrored his strength on the constellations, beautiful naked man was dying, strangled in the garments that he had woven. Century after century had he toiled, and here was his reward. Truly the garment had seemed heavenly at first, shot with the colours of culture, sewn with the threads of self-denial. And heavenly it had been so long as it was a garment and no more, so long as man could shed it at will and live by the essence that is his soul, and the essence, equally divine, that is his body. The sin against the body—it was for that they wept in chief; the centuries of wrong against the muscles and the nerves, and those five portals by which we can alone apprehend—glozing it over with talk of evolution, until the body was white pap, the home of ideas as colourless, last sloshy stirrings of a spirit that had grasped the stars.

"Where are you?" she sobbed.

His voice in the darkness said, "Here."

"Is there any hope, Kuno?"

"None for us."

"Where are you?"

She crawled towards him over the bodies of the dead. His blood spurted over her hands.

"Quicker," he gasped, "I am dying—but we touch, we talk, not through the Machine."

He kissed her.

"We have come back to our own. We die, but we have recaptured life, as it was in Wessex, when Ælfrid overthrew the Danes. We know what they know outside, they who dwelt in the cloud that is the colour of a pearl."

"But, Kuno, is it true? Are there still men on the surface of the earth? Is this—this tunnel, this poisoned darkness—really not the end?"

He replied:

"I have seen them, spoken to them, loved them. They are hiding in the mist and the ferns until our civilization stops. To-day they are the Homeless—to-morrow——"

"Oh, to-morrow—some fool will start the Machine again, to-morrow."

"Never," said Kuno, "never. Humanity has learnt its lesson."

As he spoke, the whole city was broken like a honeycomb. An air-ship had sailed in through the vomitory into a ruined wharf. It crashed downwards, exploding as it went, rending gallery after gallery with its wings of steel. For a moment they saw the nations of the dead, and, before they joined them, scraps of the untainted sky.

1928

Endnotes

- Note 9:
Forster seems to be mixing up historical, mythical, and fictional figures in this list. "Enicharmon" may be a misspelling of "Enitharmon," an important female figure in the mythology of William Blake; she is the first female formed after "Urizen,"

another Blakean mythical figure representing reason and law in the poet's prophetic works. "Gutch": likely refers to Mathew Gutch (1776–1861), English journalist who published negative sentiments about the French Revolution. "Ho-Yung" and "Chi-Bo-Sing" are of unknown origin. "Lafcadio Hearn" (1850–1904): Greek-Japanese writer, also named Koizumi Yakumo, who translated many French works into English; well known for interpreting Japanese literature and culture for Western audiences. "Carlyle": Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), historian and author of *The French Revolution: A History*, (1837) an authoritative look at the French Revolution. "Mirabeau": Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Count of Mirabeau (1749–1791), a French politician espousing moderation and support for a constitutional monarchy in the early stages of the French Revolution.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Lines from "The Lark Ascending" (1881), a poem by George Meredith that was turned into a musical piece of the same name by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1914.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Region in Latvia.[Return to reference 2](#)

VIRGINIA WOOLF

1882–1941

Virginia Woolf was born in London, the daughter of Julia Jackson Duckworth, a member of the Duckworth publishing family, and Leslie (later Sir Leslie) Stephen, the Victorian critic, philosopher, biographer, and scholar. She grew up within a large and talented family, educating herself in her father's magnificent library, meeting in childhood many eminent Victorians, and learning Greek from the essayist and critic Walter Pater's sister. Writing and the intellectual life thus came naturally to her. But her youth was shadowed by suffering: her older half-brother sexually abused her; her mother died in 1895, precipitating the first of her mental breakdowns; a beloved half-sister died in childbirth two years later; her father died of cancer in 1904; and a brother died of typhoid in 1906.

After her father's death she settled with her sister and two brothers in Bloomsbury, the district of London that later became associated with the group among whom she moved. The Bloomsbury Group was an intellectual coterie frequented at various times by the biographer Lytton Strachey, the economist John Maynard Keynes, the art critic Roger Fry, and the novelist E. M. Forster. When her sister, Vanessa, a notable painter, married Clive Bell, an art critic, in 1907, Woolf and her brother Adrian took another house in Bloomsbury, and there they entertained their literary and artistic friends at evening gatherings, where the conversation sparkled. The Bloomsbury Group thrived at the center of the middle-

class and upper-middle-class London intelligentsia. Their intelligence was equaled by their frankness, notably on sexual topics, and the sexual life of Bloomsbury provided ample material for discussion and contributed to Woolf's freedom of thinking about gender relations. The painter Duncan Grant, for example, was at different times the lover of Keynes, Woolf's brother Adrian, and her sister, whose daughter, Angelica, he fathered. Woolf too was bisexual; and thirteen years after her marriage to the journalist and essayist Leonard Woolf, she fell passionately in love with the poet Vita (Victoria) Sackville-West, wife of the bisexual diplomat and author Harold Nicolson. Woolf's relationship with this aristocratic lesbian inspired the most lighthearted and scintillating of her books, *Orlando* (1928), a novel about a transhistorical androgynous protagonist, whose identity shifts from masculine to feminine over centuries.

Underneath Woolf's liveliness and wit—qualities so well known among the Bloomsbury Group—lay psychological tensions created partly by her childhood wounds and partly by her perfectionism, she being her own most exacting critic. The public was unaware until her death that she had been subject to periods of severe depression, particularly after finishing a book. In March 1941 she drowned herself in a river, an act influenced by her dread of World War II (had the Nazis invaded England, she and Leonard would have been arrested by the Gestapo because Leonard was Jewish) and her fear that she was about to lose her mind and become a burden on her husband, who had supported her emotionally and intellectually. (In 1917 the Woolfs had founded the Hogarth Press, which published some of the most interesting literature of their time, including T. S. Eliot's *Poems* [1919], fiction by Maxim Gorky, Katherine Mansfield, E. M. Forster, Mulk Raj Anand, and Ahmed Ali, the English translations of Freud, an anticolonial pamphlet by C. L. R. James, and of course Virginia's novels.)

As a fiction writer Woolf rebelled against what she called the "materialism" of novelists such as her contemporaries Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, who depicted suffering and social injustice through gritty realism, and she sought to render more

intricately those aspects of consciousness in which she felt the truth of human experience lay. In her essay "Modern Fiction" she defines the task of the novelist as looking within, as conveying the mind receiving "a myriad impressions," as representing the "luminous halo" or "semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." In her novels she abandoned linear narratives in favor of interior monologues and stream-of-consciousness narration, exploring with great subtlety problems of personal identity and personal relationships as well as the significance of time, change, loss, and memory for human personality. After two conventionally realistic novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919), she developed her own style, a carefully modulated flow that brought into prose fiction something of the rhythms and imagery of lyric poetry. While intensely psychological and interior, her novels also found inspiration and material in the physical realities of the body and in the heavily trafficked and populated streets of London. In *Monday or Tuesday* (1921), a series of sketches, she explored the possibilities of moving between action and contemplation, between retrospection and anticipation, between specific external events and delicate tracings of the flow of consciousness. These technical experiments made possible those later novels in which her characteristic method is fully developed—the elegiac *Jacob's Room* (1922); *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), the first completely successful realization of her style; *To the Lighthouse* (1927), which in part memorializes her parents; *The Waves* (1931), the most experimental and difficult of her novels; and *Between the Acts* (1941), which includes a discontinuous pageant of English history and was published after her death.

Woolf was also a prodigious reviewer and essayist. She began to write criticism in 1905 for the *Times Literary Supplement* and published some five hundred reviews and essays for it and other periodicals, collected in *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Second Common Reader* (1932); her prose presents itself as suggestive rather than authoritative and has an engaging air of spontaneity. In marked contrast to the formal language of the

lecture hall or philosophical treatise, arenas and forms of learning from which women were historically barred, she writes in an informal, personal, playfully polemical tone, which is implicitly linked to her identity as a female writer. In her essays she is equally concerned with her own craft as a writer and with what it was like to be a quite different person living in a different age. At once more informal and more revealing are the six volumes of her *Letters* (1975–80) and five volumes of her *Diary* (1977–84), which she began to write in 1917. These, with their running commentary on her life and work, resemble a painter's sketchbooks and serve as a reminder that her writings, for all their variety, have the coherence found only in the work of the greatest literary artists.

Over the course of her career, Woolf grew increasingly concerned with the position of women, especially professional women, and the constrictions under which they suffered. She wrote several cogent essays on the subject, and women's social subjection also figures in her fiction. Her novel *The Years* (1937) was originally to have reflections on the position of women interspersed amid the action, but she later decided to publish them as a separate book, *Three Guineas* (1938), which also includes an incisive meditation on war (see the excerpt in "Voices from World War II," later in this volume). In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), an essay based on two lectures on "Women and Fiction" delivered to female students at Cambridge, Woolf discusses various male institutions that historically either were denied to or oppressed women. Refused access to education, wealth, and property ownership, women such as Shakespeare's imaginary sister lacked the conditions necessary to write and were unable to develop a literature of their own. Woolf advocated the creation of a literature that would include women's experience and ways of thinking, but instead of encouraging an exclusively female perspective, she proposed literature that would be "androgynous in mind" and resonate equally with men and women.

The Mark on the Wall

Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall. In order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one saw. So now I think of the fire; the steady film of yellow light upon the page of my book; the three chrysanthemums in the round glass bowl on the mantelpiece. Yes, it must have been the winter time, and we had just finished our tea, for I remember that I was smoking a cigarette when I looked up and saw the mark on the wall for the first time. I looked up through the smoke of my cigarette and my eye lodged for a moment upon the burning coals, and that old fancy of the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower came into my mind, and I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock. Rather to my relief the sight of the mark interrupted the fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps. The mark was a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece.

How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it. . . . If that mark was made by a nail, it can't have been for a picture, it must have been for a miniature—the miniature of a lady with white powdered curls, powder-dusted cheeks, and lips like red carnations. A fraud of course, for the people who had this house before us would have chosen pictures in that way—an old picture for an old room. That is the sort of people they were—very interesting people, and I think of them so often, in such queer places, because one will never see them again, never know what happened next. They wanted to leave this house because they wanted to change their style of furniture, so he said, and he was in process of saying that in his opinion art should have ideas behind it when we were torn asunder, as one is torn from the old lady about to pour out tea

and the young man about to hit the tennis ball in the back garden of the suburban villa as one rushes past in the train.

But for that mark, I'm not sure about it; I don't believe it was made by a nail after all; it's too big, too round, for that. I might get up, but if I got up and looked at it, ten to one I shouldn't be able to say for certain; because once a thing's done, no one ever knows how it happened. Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; the inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! To show how very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilisation—let me just count over a few of the things lost in one lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses—what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble—three pale blue canisters of book-binding tools? Then there were the bird cages, the iron hoops, the steel skates, the Queen Anne coal-scuttle, the bagatelle¹ board, the hand organ—all gone, and jewels, too. Opals and emeralds, they lie about the roots of turnips. What a scraping paring affair it is to be sure! The wonder is that I've any clothes on my back, that I sit surrounded by solid furniture at this moment. Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube² at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows³ like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse. Yes, that seems to express the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard. . . .

But after life. The slow pulling down of thick green stalks so that the cup of the flower, as it turns over, deluges one with purple and red light. Why, after all, should one not be born there as one is born here, helpless, speechless, unable to focus one's eyesight, groping at the roots of the grass, at the toes of the Giants? As for saying which are trees, and which are men and women, or whether there are such things, that one won't be in a condition to do for fifty years or so. There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an

indistinct colour—dim pinks and blues—which will, as time goes on, become more definite, become—I don't know what. . . .

And yet that mark on the wall is not a hole at all. It may even be caused by some round black substance, such as a small rose leaf, left over from the summer, and I, not being a very vigilant housekeeper—look at the dust on the mantelpiece, for example, the dust which, so they say, buried Troy⁴ three times over, only fragments of pots utterly refusing annihilation, as one can believe.

The tree outside the window taps very gently on the pane. . . . I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts. To steady myself, let me catch hold of the first idea that passes . . . Shakespeare. . . . Well, he will do as well as another. A man who sat himself solidly in an arm-chair, and looked into the fire, so— A shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high Heaven down through his mind. He leant his forehead on his hand, and people, looking in through the open door—for this scene is supposed to take place on a summer's evening— But how dull this is, this historical fiction! It doesn't interest me at all. I wish I could hit upon a pleasant track of thought, a track indirectly reflecting credit upon myself, for those are the pleasantest thoughts, and very frequent even in the minds of modest mouse-coloured people, who believe genuinely that they dislike to hear their own praises. They are not thoughts directly praising oneself; that is the beauty of them; they are thoughts like this:

"And then I came into the room. They were discussing botany. I said how I'd seen a flower growing on a dust heap on the site of an old house in Kingsway.⁵ The seed, I said, must have been sown in the reign of Charles the First. What flowers grew in the reign of Charles the First?" I asked—(but I don't remember the answer). Tall flowers with purple tassels to them perhaps. And so it goes on. All the time I'm dressing up the figure of myself in my own mind, lovingly, stealthily, not openly adoring it, for if I did that, I should

catch myself out, and stretch my hand at once for a book in self-protection. Indeed, it is curious how instinctively one protects the image of oneself from idolatry or any other handling that could make it ridiculous, or too unlike the original to be believed in any longer. Or is it not so very curious after all? It is a matter of great importance. Suppose the looking-glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people—what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! A world not to be lived in. As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror; that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realise more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps—but these generalisations are very worthless. The military sound of the word is enough. It recalls leading articles, cabinet ministers—a whole class of things indeed which, as a child, one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation. Generalisations bring back somehow Sunday in London, Sunday afternoon walks, Sunday luncheons, and also ways of speaking of the dead, clothes, and habits—like the habit of sitting all together in one room until a certain hour, although nobody liked it. There was a rule for everything. The rule for tablecloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little yellow compartments marked upon them, such as you may see in photographs of the carpets in the corridors of the royal palaces. Tablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths. How shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms, and the damnation which visited the disbeliever in them was only a

sense of illegitimate freedom. What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker's Table of Precedency,⁶ which has become, I suppose, since the war, half a phantom to many men and women, which soon, one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go, the mahogany sideboards and the Landseer⁷ prints, Gods and Devils, Hell and so forth, leaving us all with an intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom—if freedom exists. . . .

In certain lights that mark on the wall seems actually to project from the wall. Nor is it entirely circular. I cannot be sure, but it seems to cast a perceptible shadow, suggesting that if I ran my finger down that strip of the wall it would, at a certain point, mount and descend a small tumulus, a smooth tumulus like those barrows on the South Downs⁸ which are, they say, either tombs or camps. Of the two I should prefer them to be tombs, desiring melancholy like most English people, and finding it natural at the end of a walk to think of the bones stretched beneath the turf. . . . There must be some book about it. Some antiquary must have dug up those bones and given them a name. . . . What sort of a man is an antiquary, I wonder? Retired Colonels for the most part, I daresay, leading parties of aged labourers to the top here, examining clods of earth and stone, and getting into correspondence with the neighbouring clergy, which, being opened at breakfast time, gives them a feeling of importance, and the comparison of arrow-heads necessitates cross-country journeys to the country towns, an agreeable necessity both to them and to their elderly wives, who wish to make plum jam or to clean out the study, and have every reason for keeping that great question of the camp or the tomb in perpetual suspension, while the Colonel himself feels agreeably philosophic in accumulating evidence on both sides of the question. It is true that he does finally incline to believe in the c and, being opposed, indites a pamphlet which he is about to read at the quarterly meeting of the local society when a stroke lays him low, and his last conscious thoughts

are not of wife or child, but of the camp and that arrowhead there, which is now in the case at the local museum, together with the foot of a Chinese murderess, a handful of Elizabethan nails, a great many Tudor clay pipes, a piece of Roman pottery, and the wineglass that Nelson⁹ drank out of—proving I really don't know what.

No, no, nothing is proved, nothing is known. And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really—what shall we say?—the head of a gigantic old nail, driven in two hundred years ago, which has now, owing to the patient attrition of many generations of housemaids, revealed its head above the coat of paint, and is taking its first view of modern life in the sight of a white-walled fire-lit room, what should I gain?—Knowledge? Matter for further speculation? I can think sitting still as well as standing up. And what is knowledge? What are our learned men save the descendants of witches and hermits who crouched in caves and in woods brewing herbs, interrogating shrew-mice and writing down the language of the stars? And the less we honour them as our superstitions dwindle and our respect for beauty and health of mind increases. . . . Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea eggs. . . . How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters, with their sudden gleams of light, and their reflections—if it were not for Whitaker's Almanack—if it were not for the Table of Precedency!

I must jump up and see for myself what that mark on the wall really is—a nail, a rose-leaf, a crack in the wood?

Here is Nature once more at her old game of self-preservation. This train of thought, she perceives, is threatening mere waste of energy, even some collision with reality, for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker's Table of Precedency? The Archbishop of Canterbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; the Lord High

Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York. Everybody follows somebody, such is the philosophy of Whitaker; and the great thing is to know who follows whom. Whitaker knows, and let that, so Nature counsels, comfort you, instead of enraging you; and if you can't be comforted, if you must shatter this hour of peace, think of the mark on the wall.

I understand Nature's game—her prompting to take action as a way of ending any thought that threatens to excite or to pain. Hence, I suppose, comes our slight contempt for men of action—men, we assume, who don't think. Still, there's no harm in putting a full stop to one's disagreeable thoughts by looking at a mark on the wall.

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality which at once turns the two Archbishops and the Lord High Chancellor to the shadows of shades. Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of. . . . Wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree; and trees grow, and we don't know how they grow. For years and years they grow, without paying any attention to us, in meadows, in forests, and by the side of rivers—all things one likes to think about. The cows swish their tails beneath them on hot afternoons; they paint rivers so green that when a moorhen dives one expects to see its feathers all green when it comes up again. I like to think of the fish balanced against the stream like flags blown out; and of water-beetles slowly raising domes of mud upon the bed of the river. I like to think of the tree itself: first of the close dry sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap; I like to think of it, too, on winter's nights standing in the empty field with all leaves close-furled, nothing tender exposed to the iron bullets of the moon, a naked mast upon an earth that goes tumbling, tumbling, all

night long. The song of birds must sound very loud and strange in June; and how cold the feet of insects must feel upon it, as they make laborious progresses up the creases of the bark, or sun themselves upon the thin green awning of the leaves, and look straight in front of them with diamond-cut red eyes. . . . One by one the fibres snap beneath the immense cold pressure of the earth, then the last storm comes and, falling, the highest branches drive deep into the ground again. Even so, life isn't done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, living rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes. It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree. I should like to take each one separately—but something is getting in the way. . . . Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs?¹ Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of asphodel? I can't remember a thing. Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing. . . . There is a vast upheaval of matter. Someone is standing over me and saying:

"I'm going out to buy a newspaper."

"Yes?"

"Though it's no good buying newspapers. . . . Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war! . . . All the same, I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall."

Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail.

1921

Endnotes

- Note 1: Game played on oblong table with cue and balls. "Coal-scuttle": metal pail for carrying coal.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The London underground railway, or subway.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, heaven, the next world (in Greek mythology asphodel flowers grow in the Elysian fields).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Legendary site of ancient war chronicled in Homer's Greek epic *The Iliad*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Street in London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: *Whitaker's Almanack*, an annual compendium of information, prints a "Table of Precedency," which shows the order in which the various ranks in public life and society proceed on formal occasions.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sir Edwin Henry Landseer (1802–1873), English painter, reproductions of whose *Stag at Bay*, *Monarch of the Glen*, and similar animal paintings were often found in Victorian homes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A range of low hills in southeastern England. "Barrows": mounds of earth or stones erected by prehistoric peoples, usually as burial places.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), celebrated British admiral. "Tudor": 15th-century English.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Part of the sea off the east coast of Kent (or perhaps a reference to the South Downs, the hills mentioned earlier in "The Mark on the Wall").[Return to reference 1](#)

Modern Fiction

In making any survey, even the freest and loosest, of modern fiction, it is difficult not to take it for granted that the modern practice of the art is somehow an improvement upon the old. With their simple tools and primitive materials, it might be said, Fielding¹ did well and Jane Austen even better, but compare their opportunities with ours! Their masterpieces certainly have a strange air of simplicity. And yet the analogy between literature and the process, to choose an example, of making motor cars scarcely holds good beyond the first glance. It is doubtful whether in the course of the centuries, though we have learnt much about making machines, we have learnt anything about making literature. We do not come to write better; all that we can be said to do is to keep moving, now a little in this direction, now in that, but with a circular tendency should the whole course of the track be viewed from a sufficiently lofty pinnacle. It need scarcely be said that we make no claim to stand, even momentarily, upon that vantage-ground. On the flat, in the crowd, half blind with dust, we look back with envy to those happier warriors, whose battle is won and whose achievements wear so serene an air of accomplishment that we can scarcely refrain from whispering that the fight was not so fierce for them as for us. It is for the historian of literature to decide; for him to say if we are now beginning or ending or standing in the middle of a great period of prose fiction, for down in the plain little is visible. We only know that certain gratitudes and hostilities inspire us; that certain paths seem to lead to fertile land, others to the dust and the desert; and of this perhaps it may be worth while to attempt some account.

Our quarrel, then, is not with the classics, and if we speak of quarrelling with Mr Wells, Mr Bennett, and Mr Galsworthy;² it is partly that by the mere fact of their existence in the flesh their work has a living, breathing, everyday imperfection which bids us take

what liberties with it we choose. But it is also true, that, while we thank them for a thousand gifts, we reserve our unconditional gratitude for Mr Hardy, for Mr Conrad, and in much lesser degree for the Mr Hudson of *The Purple Land*, *Green Mansions*, and *Far Away and Long Ago*.³ Mr Wells, Mr Bennett, and Mr Galsworthy have excited so many hopes and disappointed them so persistently that our gratitude largely takes the form of thanking them for having shown us what they might have done but have not done; what we certainly could not do, but as certainly, perhaps, do not wish to do. No single phrase will sum up the charge or grievance which we have to bring against a mass of work so large in its volume and embodying so many qualities, both admirable and the reverse. If we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writers are materialists. It is because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us, and left us with the feeling that the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul. Naturally, no single word reaches the centre of three separate targets. In the case of Mr Wells it falls notably wide of the mark. And yet even with him it indicates to our thinking the fatal alloy in his genius, the great clod of clay that has got itself mixed up with the purity of his inspiration. But Mr Bennett is perhaps the worst culprit of the three, inasmuch as he is by far the best workman. He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay can creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet—if life should refuse to live there? That is a risk which the creator of *The Old Wives' Tale*, George Cannon, Edwin Clayhanger,⁴ and hosts of other figures, may well claim to have surmounted. His characters live abundantly, even unexpectedly, but it remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for? More and more they seem to us, deserting even the well-built villa in the Five Towns,⁵ to spend their time in some softly padded first-class railway carriage, pressing bells and buttons

innumerable; and the destiny to which they travel so luxuriously becomes more and more unquestionably an eternity of bliss spent in the very best hotel in Brighton.⁶ It can scarcely be said of Mr Wells that he is a materialist in the sense that he takes too much delight in the solidity of his fabric. His mind is too generous in its sympathies to allow him to spend much time in making things shipshape and substantial. He is a materialist from sheer goodness of heart, taking upon his shoulders the work that ought to have been discharged by Government officials, and in the plethora of his ideas and facts scarcely having leisure to realize, or forgetting to think important, the crudity and coarseness of his human beings. Yet what more damaging criticism can there be both of his earth and of his Heaven than that they are to be inhabited here and hereafter by his Joans and his Peters?⁷ Does not the inferiority of their natures tarnish whatever institutions and ideals may be provided for them by the generosity of their creator? Nor, profoundly though we respect the integrity and humanity of Mr Galsworthy, shall we find what we seek in his pages.

If we fasten, then, one label on all these books, on which is one word, materialists, we mean by it that they write of unimportant things; that they spend immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring.

We have to admit that we are exacting, and, further, that we find it difficult to justify our discontent by explaining what it is that we exact. We frame our question differently at different times. But it reappears most persistently as we drop the finished novel on the crest of a sigh—Is it worth while? What is the point of it all? Can it be that, owing to one of those little deviations which the human spirit seems to make from time to time, Mr Bennett has come down with his magnificent apparatus for catching life just an inch or two on the wrong side? Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worth while. It is a confession of vagueness to have to make use of such a figure as this, but we scarcely better the matter by speaking, as critics are prone to do, of reality. Admitting the vagueness which afflicts all criticism of novels, let us hazard the

opinion that for us at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. Nevertheless, we go on perseveringly, conscientiously, constructing our two and thirty chapters after a design which more and more ceases to resemble the vision in our minds. So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story is not merely labour thrown away but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception. The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn. But sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this?

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being "like this." Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday,⁸ the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street⁹ tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig-lamps¹ symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the

end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

It is, at any rate, in some such fashion as this that we seek to define the quality which distinguishes the work of several young writers, among whom Mr James Joyce is the most notable, from that of their predecessors. They attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist. Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small. Anyone who has read *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or, what promises to be a far more interesting work, *Ulysses*,² now appearing in the *Little Review*, will have hazarded some theory of this nature as to Mr Joyce's intention. On our part, with such a fragment before us, it is hazarded rather than affirmed; but whatever the intention of the whole, there can be no question but that it is of the utmost sincerity and that the result, difficult or unpleasant as we may judge it, is undeniably important. In contrast with those whom we have called materialists, Mr Joyce is spiritual; he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see. The scene in the cemetery,³ for instance, with its brilliancy, its sordidity, its incoherence, its sudden lightning

flashes of significance, does undoubtedly come so close to the quick of the mind that, on a first reading at any rate, it is difficult not to acclaim a masterpiece. If we want life itself, here surely we have it. Indeed, we find ourselves fumbling rather awkwardly if we try to say what else we wish, and for what reason a work of such originality yet fails to compare, for we must take high examples, with *Youth* or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.⁴ It fails because of the comparative poverty of the writer's mind, we might say simply and have done with it. But it is possible to press a little further and wonder whether we may not refer our sense of being in a bright yet narrow room, confined and shut in, rather than enlarged and set free, to some limitation imposed by the method as well as by the mind. Is it the method that inhibits the creative power? Is it due to the method that we feel neither jovial nor magnanimous, but centred in a self which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond? Does the emphasis laid, perhaps didactically, upon indecency contribute to the effect of something angular and isolated? Or is it merely that in any effort of such originality it is much easier, for contemporaries especially, to feel what it lacks than to name what it gives? In any case it is a mistake to stand outside examining "methods". Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers. This method has the merit of bringing us closer to what we were prepared to call life itself; did not the reading of *Ulysses* suggest how much of life is excluded or ignored, and did it not come with a shock to open *Tristram Shandy* or even *Pendennis*⁵ and be by them convinced that there are not only other aspects of life, but more important ones into the bargain.

However this may be, the problem before the novelist at present, as we suppose it to have been in the past, is to contrive means of being free to set down what he chooses. He has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer "this" but "that": out of "that" alone must he construct his work. For the moderns "that", the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology. At

once, therefore, the accent falls a little differently; the emphasis is upon something hitherto ignored; at once a different outline of form becomes necessary, difficult for us to grasp, incomprehensible to our predecessors. No one but a modern, no one perhaps but a Russian, would have felt the interest of the situation which Tchekov has made into the short story which he calls "Gusev."⁶ Some Russian soldiers lie ill on board a ship which is taking them back to Russia. We are given a few scraps of their talk and some of their thoughts; then one of them dies and is carried away; the talk goes on among the others for a time, until Gusev himself dies, and looking "like a carrot or a radish" is thrown overboard. The emphasis is laid upon such unexpected places that at first it seems as if there were no emphasis at all; and then, as the eyes accustom themselves to twilight and discern the shapes of things in a room we see how complete the story is, how profound, and how truly in obedience to his vision Tchekov has chosen this, that, and the other, and placed them together to compose something new. But it is impossible to say "this is comic," or "that is tragic," nor are we certain, since short stories, we have been taught, should be brief and conclusive, whether this, which is vague and inconclusive, should be called a short story at all.

The most elementary remarks upon modern English fiction can hardly avoid some mention of the Russian influence, and if the Russians are mentioned one runs the risk of feeling that to write of any fiction save theirs is waste of time. If we want understanding of the soul and heart where else shall we find it of comparable profundity? If we are sick of our own materialism the least considerable of their novelists has by right of birth a natural reverence for the human spirit. "Learn to make yourself akin to people. . . . But let this sympathy be not with the mind—for it is easy with the mind—but with the heart, with love towards them." In every great Russian writer we seem to discern the features of a saint, if sympathy for the sufferings of others, love towards them, endeavour to reach some goal worthy of the most exacting demands of the spirit constitute saintliness. It is the saint in them which confounds us with a feeling of our own irreligious triviality, and turns

so many of our famous novels to tinsel and trickery. The conclusions of the Russian mind, thus comprehensive and compassionate, are inevitably, perhaps, of the utmost sadness. More accurately indeed we might speak of the inconclusiveness of the Russian mind. It is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair. They are right perhaps; unquestionably they see further than we do and without our gross impediments of vision. But perhaps we see something that escapes them, or why should this voice of protest mix itself with our gloom? The voice of protest is the voice of another and an ancient civilisation which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand. English fiction from Sterne to Meredith⁷ bears witness to our natural delight in humour and comedy, in the beauty of earth, in the activities of the intellect, and in the splendour of the body. But any deductions that we may draw from the comparison of two fictions so immeasurably far apart are futile save indeed as they flood us with a view of the infinite possibilities of the art and remind us that there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing—no “method,” no experiment, even of the wildest—is forbidden, but only falsity and pretence. “The proper stuff of fiction” does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured.

1925

Endnotes

- Note 1: Henry Fielding (1707–1754), English novelist. [Return to reference 1](#)

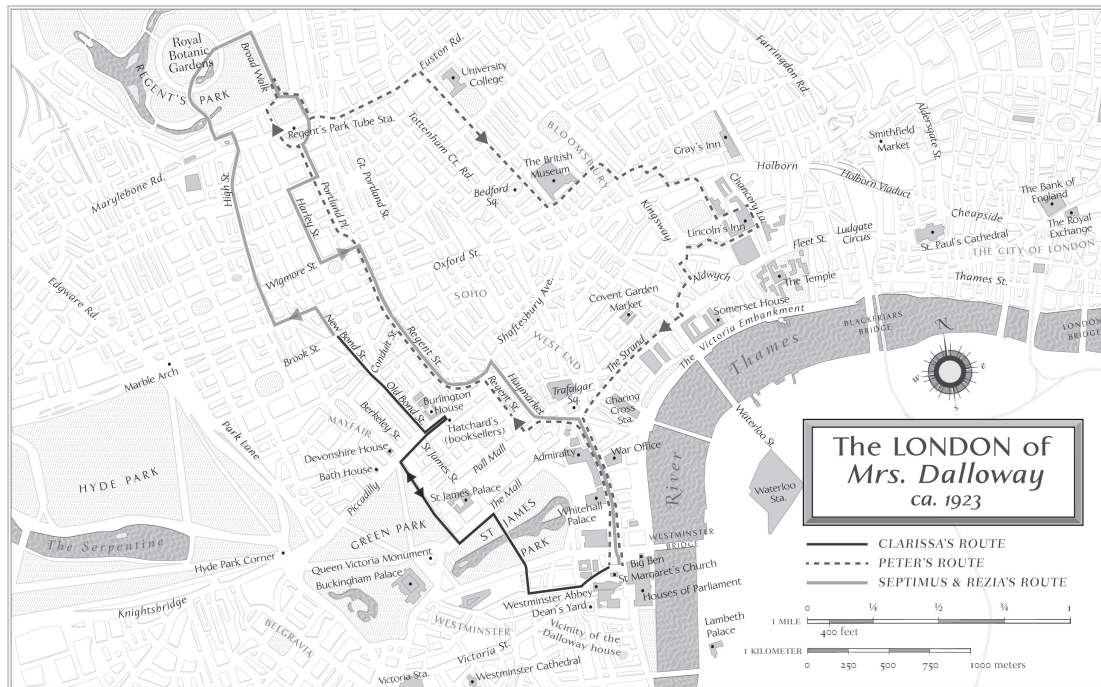
- Note 2: H. G. Wells (1866–1946), Arnold Bennett (1867–1931), John Galsworthy (1867–1933), English novelists.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: W. H. Hudson (1841–1922), naturalist and writer, was born in Argentina, although he later lived in London. *The Purple Land* (1885) is about South America; *Green Mansions* (1904), a novel set in South America, was his first real success.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Characters in Arnold Bennett's novels; *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) is the best known.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The pottery towns of Staffordshire in which much of Bennett's fiction was set.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Once-fashionable seaside resort on the southwest coast of England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In his novel *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education* (1918), Wells advocates education to address social problems.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Monday or Tuesday* was Woolf's 1921 collection of experimental stories and sketches.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Fashionable shopping street in London.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Carriage lamps.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Written April, 1919 [*Woolf's note*].[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The sixth episode ("Hades") of *Ulysses*, where Bloom goes to Paddy Dignam's funeral.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A story and a novel by, respectively, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Novels by, respectively, the English writers Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) and William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: 1890 story by the Russian writer Anton Chekhov (1860–1904).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: George Meredith (1828–1909), English novelist.[Return to reference 7](#)

Mrs. Dalloway “Look within,” Virginia Woolf urges in her essay “Modern Fiction” (1919, revised 1925): “Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.” Her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* looks deep within the consciousness of a middle-aged woman planning an evening party on a fine London day in the middle of June 1923. In exploring the events of a single day, Woolf’s novel recalls James Joyce’s day-long narrative in *Ulysses* (1922), which, despite her reservations about its form and “indecent,” she admired for revealing “the flickering of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain.”

In Woolf’s more intimately scaled novel, Clarissa Dalloway’s “ordinary mind on an ordinary day” is revealed to contain extraordinary riches, and so too, Woolf suggests, might any mind on any day, at least for the sufficiently attentive novelist. As Clarissa walks through London’s streets, reacting to the flood of sights and sounds around her, her exhilarated if fleeting impressions of the present often give way to steel-engraved memories of her young adulthood in an idyllic countryside home in Bourton. Following her there through thoughts conveyed in rich metaphors, precise rhythms, and finely spun syntax, we learn of her disappointed suitor Peter Walsh, alluring but too demanding, now a civil servant in India, though he has made a surprising return; the victorious but predictable suitor Richard Dalloway, still her husband and a Conservative member of Parliament; her independent-minded socialist friend Sally Seton, who once planted a burning kiss on her lips, and many years later will unexpectedly appear at Clarissa’s party. Thoughts of more-recent events surge just below the surface, such as her daughter Elizabeth’s disturbing infatuation with her zealous history tutor. Dismissing more realist novelists’ preoccupation with the externalities of plot, Woolf wrote in her diary: “I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth.”

However isolated in its cavelike interiority, each mind in *Mrs. Dalloway* intersects with many others. "The idea is that the caves shall connect," said Woolf, elaborating her metaphor, "and each comes to daylight at the present moment." When a car loudly backfires, the shock of the sound and the mystery of the opulent car's occupants form a hinge between Clarissa Dalloway's consciousness and that of her double, Septimus Warren Smith, a veteran traumatized by his experience on the Western Front in World War I. The two characters never directly meet in the novel, but the narrative weaves back and forth between their minds—"the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side," in Woolf's words. Showing Septimus to be a casualty of modern warfare, class stratification, and the mental health profession, her novel questions the solidity of the dividing line between the sane and the insane. Like many thousands of young men, such as the war poets included in the section "Voices of World War I," Septimus had volunteered to fight for a Britain idealized as Shakespeare and English culture; but the carnage of the war, including the irrepressible memory of his dear friend Evans's death, has demolished all hope for, and faith in, English civilization.

In plumbing the depths of her characters' minds, Woolf's narrative subtly glides from one character to another, and from one narrative method to another, including direct speech, interior monologue, and free indirect speech. The events of the day are refracted from an almost cubistic array of angles, as when bystanders speculate on who is in that mysterious car. When an airplane writes a brand name in the sky, observers arrive at different readings of the airy inscription. The passage of time, as hauntingly and insistently signaled by Big Ben's chimes, assumes various forms in the minds of Woolf's characters.



Mrs. Dalloway traces the movement of Woolf's characters through London, including the near misses and intersections of modern city life. Both distinctive and overlapping in their mental experience, characters as unlike as Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Smith share both physical and psychological space. This map highlights some of the novel's London landmarks and the approximate routes taken by the main characters on a single day in mid-June 1923.

But for all her interest in focusing on what Woolf called the "radiant halo" of consciousness, things happen in *Mrs. Dalloway*—sometimes violent things. Woolf wrote of her intentions for her novel, "I want to criticise the social system, & to show it at work, at its most intense." She observes Clarissa's class position both sympathetically and critically, a society hostess arranging her all-important party with the labor of less privileged household workers. The British class system is shown to perpetuate the wealth and power of royalty, politicians, and doctors, while putting enormous pressure on people like Septimus Smith and Elizabeth's ill-fated history tutor of German descent. Medical professionals, such as Septimus Smith's doctors, seem to advance themselves above all and

to miss the reflection, in some psychiatric illnesses, of a deeply flawed social order. The British Empire demands obeisance to nationalistic symbols of itself and crushes people like Septimus who are summoned to fulfill its will. Barriers along gender lines block the social advancement of women, as well as same-sex sexual fulfillment.

Woolf's ability to "dig out" both the human mind and the social structures and strictures that shape it has helped to make *Mrs. Dalloway* one of the most influential novels of the twentieth century; the work has been rewritten in various novels, including Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998), and adapted for film. In conveying, as part of a larger social mix, the intricacies of Clarissa Dalloway's thoughts and feelings on a summer's day—her exultation in flowers, her longings and regrets in friendship and love, her anxieties about the hovering threat of despondency and death—Woolf fulfills her aspiration to portray life as "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."

Mrs. Dalloway

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy¹ had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men² were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton³ into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?"—was that it?—"I prefer men to cauliflowers"—was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace—Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished—how strange it was!—a few sayings like this about cabbages.

She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van⁴ to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster⁵); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright.

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty,—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza⁶) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street.⁷ For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps,⁸ the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

For it was the middle of June. The War⁹ was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar¹ they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven—over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace.² And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh³ and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run; and even now, at this hour, discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery; and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in

their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans (but one must economise, not buy things rashly for Elizabeth), and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges,⁴ she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party. But how strange, on entering the Park,⁵ the silence; the mist; the hum; the slow-swimming happy ducks; the pouched birds waddling; and who should be coming along with his back against the Government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal Arms,⁶ who but Hugh Whitbread; her old friend Hugh—the admirable Hugh!

“Good-morning to you, Clarissa!” said Hugh, rather extravagantly, for they had known each other as children. “Where are you off to?”

“I love walking in London,” said Mrs. Dalloway. “Really it’s better than walking in the country.”

They had just come up—unfortunately—to see doctors. Other people came to see pictures; go to the opera; take their daughters out; the Whitbreads came “to see doctors.” Times without number Clarissa had visited Evelyn Whitbread in a nursing home. Was Evelyn ill again? Evelyn was a good deal out of sorts, said Hugh, intimating by a kind of pout or swell of his very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body (he was almost too well dressed always, but presumably had to be, with his little job at Court) that his wife had some internal ailment, nothing serious, which, as an old friend, Clarissa Dalloway would quite understand without requiring him to specify. Ah yes, she did of course; what a nuisance; and felt very sisterly and oddly conscious at the same time of her hat. Not the right hat for the early morning, was that it? For Hugh always made her feel, as he bustled on, raising his hat rather extravagantly and assuring her that she might be a girl of eighteen, and of course he was coming to her party to-night, Evelyn absolutely insisted, only a little late he might be after the party at the Palace to which he had to take one of Jim’s boys,—she always felt a little skimpy beside Hugh; schoolgirlish; but attached to him, partly from

having known him always, but she did think him a good sort in his own way, though Richard was nearly driven mad by him, and as for Peter Walsh, he had never to this day forgiven her for liking him.

She could remember scene after scene at Bourton—Peter furious; Hugh not, of course, his match in any way, but still not a positive imbecile as Peter made out; not a mere barber's block. When his old mother wanted him to give up shooting or to take her to Bath⁷ he did it, without a word; he was really unselfish, and as for saying, as Peter did, that he had no heart, no brain, nothing but the manners and breeding of an English gentleman, that was only her dear Peter at his worst; and he could be intolerable; he could be impossible; but adorable to walk with on a morning like this.

(June had drawn out every leaf on the trees. The mothers of Pimlico⁸ gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty.⁹ Arlington Street and Piccadilly¹ seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she had adored all that.)

For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks; but suddenly it would come over her, If he were with me now what would he say?—some days, some sights bringing him back to her calmly, without the old bitterness; which perhaps was the reward of having cared for people; they came back in the middle of St. James's Park on a fine morning—indeed they did. But Peter—however beautiful the day might be, and the trees and the grass, and the little girl in pink—Peter never saw a thing of all that. He would put on his spectacles, if she told him to; he would look. It was the state of the world that interested him; Wagner, Pope's poetry,² people's characters eternally, and the defects of her own soul. How he scolded her! How they argued! She would marry a Prime Minister and stand at the top of a staircase; the perfect hostess he called her (she had cried over it in her bedroom), she had the makings of the perfect hostess, he said.

So she would still find herself arguing in St. James's Park, still making out that she had been right—and she had too—not to marry

him. For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced; though she had borne about with her for years like an arrow sticking in her heart the grief, the anguish; and then the horror of the moment when some one told her at a concert that he had married a woman met on the boat going to India! Never should she forget all that! Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her. Never could she understand how he cared. But those Indian women did presumably—silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops. And she wasted her pity. For he was quite happy, he assured her—perfectly happy, though he had never done a thing that they talked of; his whole life had been a failure. It made her angry still.

She had reached the Park gates.³ She stood for a moment, looking at the omnibuses in Piccadilly.

She would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that. She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels⁴ gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.

Her only gift was knowing people almost by instinct, she thought, walking on. If you put her in a room with some one, up went her

back like a cat's; or she purred. Devonshire House, Bath House, the house with the china cockatoo,⁵ she had seen them all lit up once; and remembered Sylvia, Fred, Sally Seton—such hosts of people; and dancing all night; and the waggons plodding past to market; and driving home across the Park. She remembered once throwing a shilling into the Serpentine.⁶ But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street,⁷ did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. But what was she dreaming as she looked into Hatchards'⁸ shop window? What was she trying to recover? What image of white dawn in the country, as she read in the book spread open:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun
Nor the furious winter's rages.⁹

This late age of the world's experience had bred in them all, all men and women, a well of tears. Tears and sorrows; courage and endurance; a perfectly upright and stoical bearing. Think, for example, of the woman she admired most, Lady Bexborough, opening the bazaar.

There were Jorrocks' *Jaunts and Jollities*; there were *Soapy Sponge* and Mrs. Asquith's *Memoirs* and *Big Game Shooting in Nigeria*,¹ all spread open. Ever so many books there were; but none that seemed exactly right to take to Evelyn Whitbread in her nursing home. Nothing that would serve to amuse her and make that

indescribably dried-up little woman look, as Clarissa came in, just for a moment cordial; before they settled down for the usual interminable talk of women's ailments. How much she wanted it—that people should look pleased as she came in, Clarissa thought and turned and walked back towards Bond Street, annoyed, because it was silly to have other reasons for doing things. Much rather would she have been one of those people like Richard who did things for themselves, whereas, she thought, waiting to cross, half the time she did things not simply, not for themselves; but to make people think this or that; perfect idiocy she knew (and now the policeman held up his hand) for no one was ever for a second taken in. Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently!

She would have been, in the first place, dark like Lady Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes. She would have been, like Lady Bexborough, slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere. Instead of which she had a narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's. That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well, considering that she spent little. But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing—nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway.

Bond Street fascinated her; Bond Street early in the morning in the season; its flags flying; its shops; no splash; no glitter; one roll of tweed in the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls; salmon on an iceblock.

"That is all," she said, looking at the fishmonger's. "That is all," she repeated, pausing for a moment at the window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves. And her

old Uncle William used to say a lady is known by her shoes and her gloves. He had turned on his bed one morning in the middle of the War. He had said, "I have had enough." Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them.

Not a straw, she thought, going on up Bond Street to a shop where they kept flowers for her when she gave a party. Elizabeth really cared for her dog most of all. The whole house this morning smelt of tar. Still, better poor Grizzle than Miss Kilman; better distemper and tar² and all the rest of it than sitting mewed in a stuffy bedroom with a prayer book! Better anything, she was inclined to say. But it might be only a phase, as Richard said, such as all girls go through. It might be falling in love. But why with Miss Kilman? who had been badly treated of course; one must make allowances for that, and Richard said she was very able, had a really historical mind. Anyhow they were inseparable, and Elizabeth, her own daughter, went to Communion; and how she dressed, how she treated people who came to lunch she did not care a bit, it being her experience that the religious ecstasy made people callous (so did causes); dulled their feelings, for Miss Kilman would do anything for the Russians, starved herself for the Austrians,³ but in private inflicted positive torture, so insensitive was she, dressed in a green mackintosh coat.⁴ Year in year out she wore that coat; she perspired; she was never in the room five minutes without making you feel her superiority, your inferiority; how poor she was; how rich you were; how she lived in a slum without a cushion or a bed or a rug or whatever it might be, all her soul rusted with that grievance sticking in it, her dismissal from school during the War—poor embittered unfortunate creature! For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants; for no doubt with another throw of the dice, had the black been

uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No.

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster! to hear twigs cracking and feel hooves planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest, the soul; never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred!

Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the swing doors of Mulberry's the florists.

She advanced, light, tall, very upright, to be greeted at once by button-faced Miss Pym, whose hands were always bright red, as if they had been stood in cold water with the flowers.

There were flowers: delphiniums, sweet peas, bunches of lilac; and carnations, masses of carnations. There were roses; there were irises. Ah yes—so she breathed in the earthy garden sweet smell as she stood talking to Miss Pym who owed her help, and thought her kind, for kind she had been years ago; very kind, but she looked older, this year, turning her head from side to side among the irises and roses and nodding tufts of lilac with her eyes half closed, snuffing in, after the street uproar, the delicious scent, the exquisite coolness. And then, opening her eyes, how fresh like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up; and all the sweet peas spreading in their bowls, tinged violet, snow white, pale—as if it were the evening and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower—roses, carnations, irises, lilac—glows; white, violet, red, deep orange; every flower seems to burn by itself, softly, purely in the

misty beds; and how she loved the grey-white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie,⁵ over the evening primroses!

And as she began to go with Miss Pym from jar to jar, choosing, nonsense, nonsense, she said to herself, more and more gently, as if this beauty, this scent, this colour, and Miss Pym liking her, trusting her, were a wave which she let flow over her and surmount that hatred, that monster, surmount it all; and it lifted her up and up when—oh! a pistol shot in the street outside!

"Dear, those motor cars,"⁶ said Miss Pym, going to the window to look, and coming back and smiling apologetically with her hands full of sweet peas, as if those motor cars, those tyres of motor cars, were all *her* fault.

The violent explosion which made Mrs. Dalloway jump and Miss Pym go to the window and apologise came from a motor car which had drawn to the side of the pavement precisely opposite Mulberry's shop window. Passers-by who, of course, stopped and stared, had just time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey.

Yet rumours were at once in circulation from the middle of Bond Street to Oxford Street on one side, to Atkinson's scent⁷ shop on the other, passing invisibly, inaudibly, like a cloud, swift, veil-like upon hills, falling indeed with something of a cloud's sudden sobriety and stillness upon faces which a second before had been utterly disorderly. But now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen. Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew.

Edgar J. Watkiss, with his roll of lead piping round his arm, said audibly, humorously of course: "The Proime Minister's kyar."

Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him.

Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat, with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which makes complete strangers apprehensive too. The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?

Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot because the motor car had stopped outside Mulberry's shop window; old ladies on the tops of omnibuses spread their black parasols; here a green, here a red parasol opened with a little pop. Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Every one looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose?

"Let us go on, Septimus," said his wife, a little woman, with large eyes in a sallow pointed face; an Italian girl.

But Lucrezia herself could not help looking at the motor car and the tree pattern on the blinds. Was it the Queen in there—the Queen going shopping?

The chauffeur, who had been opening something, turning something, shutting something, got on to the box.⁸

"Come on," said Lucrezia.

But her husband, for they had been married four, five years now, jumped, started, and said, "All right!" angrily, as if she had interrupted him.

People must notice; people must see. People, she thought, looking at the crowd staring at the motor car; the English people, with their children and their horses and their clothes, which she admired in a way; but they were "people" now, because Septimus had said, "I will kill myself"; an awful thing to say. Suppose they had heard him? She looked at the crowd. Help, help! she wanted to cry out to butchers' boys and women. Help! Only last autumn she and Septimus had stood on the Embankment⁹ wrapped in the same cloak and, Septimus reading a paper instead of talking, she had snatched it from him and laughed in the old man's face who saw them! But failure one conceals. She must take him away into some park.

"Now we will cross," she said.

She had a right to his arm, though it was without feeling. He would give her, who was so simple, so impulsive, only twenty-four, without friends in England, who had left Italy for his sake, a piece of bone.

The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds. Even the sex was now in dispute. But there could be no doubt that greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's-breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first and last time, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will be known to curious antiquaries, sifting the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along the pavement this Wednesday morning are but bones with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth. The face in the motor car will then be known.

It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs. Dalloway, coming out of Mulberry's with her flowers; the Queen. And for a second she wore a

look of extreme dignity standing by the flower shop in the sunlight while the car passed at a foot's pace, with its blinds drawn. The Queen going to some hospital; the Queen opening some bazaar, thought Clarissa.

The crush was terrific for the time of day. Lords, Ascot, Hurlingham,¹ what was it? she wondered, for the street was blocked. The British middle classes sitting sideways on the tops of omnibuses with parcels and umbrellas, yes, even furs on a day like this, were, she thought, more ridiculous, more unlike anything there has ever been than one could conceive; and the Queen herself held up; the Queen herself unable to pass. Clarissa was suspended on one side of Brook Street;² Sir John Buckhurst, the old Judge on the other, with the car between them (Sir John had laid down the law for years and liked a well-dressed woman) when the chauffeur, leaning ever so slightly, said or showed something to the policeman, who saluted and raised his arm and jerked his head and moved the omnibus to the side and the car passed through. Slowly and very silently it took its way.

Clarissa guessed; Clarissa knew of course; she had seen something white, magical, circular, in the footman's hand, a disc inscribed with a name,—the Queen's, the Prince of Wales's, the Prime Minister's?—which, by force of its own lustre, burnt its way through (Clarissa saw the car diminishing, disappearing), to blaze among candelabras, glittering stars, breasts stiff with oak leaves,³ Hugh Whitbread and all his colleagues, the gentlemen of England, that night in Buckingham Palace. And Clarissa, too, gave a party. She stiffened a little; so she would stand at the top of her stairs.

The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way—to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves—should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey?—ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration;

yet in its fulness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each other and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. In a public house⁴ in a back street a Colonial⁵ insulted the House of Windsor⁶ which led to words, broken beer glasses, and a general shindy,⁷ which echoed strangely across the way in the ears of girls buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings. For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound.

Gliding across Piccadilly, the car turned down St. James's Street. Tall men, men of robust physique, well-dressed men with their tail-coats and their white slips⁸ and their hair raked back who, for reasons difficult to discriminate, were standing in the bow window of Brooks's⁹ with their hands behind the tails of their coats, looking out, perceived instinctively that greatness was passing, and the pale light of the immortal presence fell upon them as it had fallen upon Clarissa Dalloway. At once they stood even straighter, and removed their hands, and seemed ready to attend their Sovereign, if need be, to the cannon's mouth, as their ancestors had done before them. The white busts and the little tables in the background covered with copies of the *Tatler*¹ and syphons of soda water seemed to approve; seemed to indicate the flowing corn and the manor houses of England; and to return the frail hum of the motor wheels as the walls of a whispering gallery return a single voice expanded and made sonorous by the might of a whole cathedral.² Shawled Moll Pratt with her flowers on the pavement wished the dear boy well (it was the Prince of Wales for certain) and would have tossed the price of a pot of beer—a bunch of roses—into St. James's Street out of sheer light-heartedness and contempt of poverty had she not seen the constable's eye upon her, discouraging an old Irishwoman's loyalty. The sentries at St. James's saluted; Queen Alexandra's policeman³ approved.

A small crowd meanwhile had gathered at the gates of Buckingham Palace. Listlessly, yet confidently, poor people all of

them, they waited; looked at the Palace itself with the flag flying; at Victoria, billowing on her mound,⁴ admired her shelves of running water, her geraniums; singled out from the motor cars in the Mall⁵ first this one, then that; bestowed emotion, vainly, upon commoners out for a drive; recalled their tribute to keep it unspent while this car passed and that; and all the time let rumour accumulate in their veins and thrill the nerves in their thighs at the thought of Royalty looking at them; the Queen bowing; the Prince saluting; at the thought of the heavenly life divinely bestowed upon Kings; of the equerries⁶ and deep curtsies; of the Queen's old doll's house;⁷ of Princess Mary married to an Englishman, and the Prince—ah! the Prince! who took wonderfully, they said, after old King Edward,⁸ but was ever so much slimmer. The Prince lived at St. James's; but he might come along in the morning to visit his mother.

So Sarah Bletchley said with her baby in her arms, tipping her foot up and down as though she were by her own fender in Pimlico, but keeping her eyes on the Mall, while Emily Coates ranged over the Palace windows and thought of the housemaids, the innumerable housemaids, the bedrooms, the innumerable bedrooms. Joined by an elderly gentleman with an Aberdeen terrier, by men without occupation, the crowd increased. Little Mr. Bowley, who had rooms in the Albany⁹ and was sealed with wax over the deeper sources of life but could be unsealed suddenly, inappropriately, sentimentally, by this sort of thing—poor women waiting to see the Queen go past—poor women, nice little children, orphans, widows, the War—tut-tut—actually had tears in his eyes. A breeze flaunting ever so warmly down the Mall through the thin trees, past the bronze heroes,¹ lifted some flag flying in the British breast of Mr. Bowley and he raised his hat as the car turned into the Mall and held it high as the car approached; and let the poor mothers of Pimlico press close to him, and stood very upright. The car came on.

Suddenly Mrs. Coates looked up into the sky. The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which

curled and twisted, actually writing something! making letters in the sky!² Every one looked up.

Dropping dead down the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose, and whatever it did, wherever it went, out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? an E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps?

"Glaxo,"³ said Mrs. Coates in a strained, awe-stricken voice, gazing straight up, and her baby, lying stiff and white in her arms, gazed straight up.

"Kreemo," murmured Mrs. Bletchley, like a sleepwalker. With his hat held out perfectly still in his hand, Mr. Bowley gazed straight up. All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, first one gull leading, then another, and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls.

The aeroplane turned and raced and swooped exactly where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater—

"That's an E," said Mrs. Bletchley—or a dancer—

"It's toffee," murmured Mr. Bowley—(and the car went in at the gates and nobody looked at it), and shutting off the smoke, away and away it rushed, and the smoke faded and assembled itself round the broad white shapes of the clouds.

It had gone; it was behind the clouds. There was no sound. The clouds to which the letters E, G, or L had attached themselves moved freely, as if destined to cross from West to East on a mission of the greatest importance which would never be revealed, and yet certainly so it was—a mission of the greatest importance. Then suddenly, as a train comes out of a tunnel, the aeroplane rushed out of the clouds again, the sound boring into the ears of all people in the Mall, in the Green Park,⁴ in Piccadilly, in Regent Street, in

Regent's Park, and the bar of smoke curved behind and it dropped down, and it soared up and wrote one letter after another—but what word was it writing?

Lucrezia Warren Smith, sitting by her husband's side on a seat in Regent's Park in the Broad Walk,⁵ looked up.

"Look, look, Septimus!" she cried. For Dr. Holmes had told her to make her husband (who had nothing whatever seriously the matter with him but was a little out of sorts) take an interest in things outside himself.

So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of unimaginable beauty and signalling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty! Tears ran down his cheeks.

It was toffee; they were advertising toffee, a nursemaid told Rezia. Together they began to spell t . . . o . . . f . . .

"K . . . R . . ." said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say "Kay Arr" close to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper's, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke. A marvellous discovery indeed—that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions (for one must be scientific, above all scientific) can quicken trees into life! Happily Rezia put her hand with a tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down, transfixed, or the excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave, like plumes on horses' heads, feathers on ladies', so proudly they rose and fell, so superbly, would have sent him mad. But he would not go mad. He would shut his eyes; he would see no more.

But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. A child cried. Rightly far away a horn sounded. All taken together meant the birth of a new religion—

"Septimus!" said Rezia. He started violently. People must notice.

"I am going to walk to the fountain and back," she said.

For she could stand it no longer. Dr. Holmes might say there was nothing the matter. Far rather would she that he were dead! She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible; sky and tree, children playing, dragging carts, blowing whistles, falling down; all were terrible. And he would not kill himself; and she could tell no one. "Septimus has been working too hard"—that was all she could say to her own mother. To love makes one solitary, she thought. She could tell nobody, not even Septimus now, and looking back, she saw him sitting in his shabby overcoat alone on the seat, hunched up, staring. And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought;⁶ he was brave; he was not Septimus now. She put on her lace collar. She put on her new hat and he never noticed; and he was happy without her. Nothing could make her happy without him! Nothing! He was selfish. So men are. For he was not ill. Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. She spread her hand before her. Look! Her wedding ring slipped—she had grown so thin. It was she who suffered—but she had nobody to tell.

Far was Italy and the white houses and the room where her sisters sat making hats, and the streets crowded every evening with people walking, laughing out loud, not half alive like people here, huddled up in Bath chairs,⁷ looking at a few ugly flowers stuck in pots!

"For you should see the Milan gardens,"⁸ she said aloud. But to whom?

There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hillsides soften and fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit—the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each windowpane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye; exists again. I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park (staring at the Indian and his cross⁹), as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans¹ saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where—such was her darkness; when suddenly, as if a shelf were shot forth and she stood on it, she said how she was his wife, married years ago in Milan, his wife, and would never, never tell that he was mad! Turning, the shelf fell; down, down she dropped. For he was gone, she thought—gone, as he threatened, to kill himself—to throw himself under a cart! But no; there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud.

Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words,² from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk,³ how there is no death.

There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings!

"What are you saying?" said Rezia suddenly, sitting down by him. Interrupted again! She was always interrupting.

Away from people—they must get away from people, he said (jumping up), right away over there, where there were chairs beneath a tree and the long slope of the park dipped like a length of green stuff with a ceiling cloth of blue and pink smoke high above, and there was a rampart of far irregular houses hazed in smoke, the traffic hummed in a circle, and on the right, duncoloured animals stretched long necks over the Zoo⁴ palings, barking, howling. There they sat down under a tree.

"Look," she implored him, pointing at a little troop of boys carrying cricket stumps,⁵ and one shuffled, spun round on his heel and shuffled, as if he were acting a clown at the music hall.

"Look," she implored him, for Dr. Holmes had told her to make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket—that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband.

"Look," she repeated.

Look the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness.

"Look," she repeated, for he must not talk aloud to himself out of doors.

"Oh look," she implored him. But what was there to look at? A few sheep. That was all.

The way to Regent's Park Tube⁶ station—could they tell her the way to Regent's Park Tube station—Maisie Johnson wanted to know.

She was only up from Edinburgh⁷ two days ago.

"Not this way—over there!" Rezia exclaimed, waving her aside, lest she should see Septimus.

Both seemed queer, Maisie Johnson thought. Everything seemed very queer. In London for the first time, come to take up a post at her uncle's in Leadenhall Street,⁸ and now walking through Regent's Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer; so that should she be very old she would still remember and make it jangle again among her memories how she had walked through Regent's Park on a fine summer's morning fifty years ago. For she was only nineteen and had got her way at last, to come to London; and now how queer it was, this couple she had asked the way of, and the girl started and jerked her hand, and the man—he seemed awfully odd; quarrelling, perhaps; parting for ever, perhaps; something was up, she knew; and now all these people (for she returned to the Broad Walk), the stone basins, the prim flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs—all seemed, after Edinburgh, so queer. And Maisie Johnson, as she joined that gently trudging, vaguely gazing, breeze-kissed company—squirrels perching and preening, sparrow fountains fluttering for crumbs, dogs busy with the railings, busy with each other, while the soft warm air washed over them and lent to the fixed unsurprised gaze with which they received life something whimsical and mollified—Maisie Johnson positively felt she must cry Oh! (for that young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew.)

Horror! horror! she wanted to cry. (She had left her people; they had warned her what would happen.)

Why hadn't she stayed at home? she cried, twisting the knob of the iron railing.

That girl, thought Mrs. Dempster (who saved crusts for the squirrels and often ate her lunch in Regent's Park), don't know a thing yet; and really it seemed to her better to be a little stout, a little slack, a little moderate in one's expectations. Percy drank. Well, better to have a son, thought Mrs. Dempster. She had had a hard

time of it, and couldn't help smiling at a girl like that. You'll get married, for you're pretty enough, thought Mrs. Dempster. Get married, she thought, and then you'll know. Oh, the cooks, and so on. Every man has his ways. But whether I'd have chosen quite like that if I could have known, thought Mrs. Dempster, and could not help wishing to whisper a word to Maisie Johnson; to feel on the creased pouch of her worn old face the kiss of pity. For it's been a hard life, thought Mrs. Dempster. What hadn't she given to it? Roses; figure; her feet too. (She drew the knobbed lumps beneath her skirt.)

Roses, she thought sardonically. All trash, m'dear. For really, what with eating, drinking, and mating, the bad days and good, life had been no mere matter of roses, and what was more, let me tell you, Carrie Dempster had no wish to change her lot with any woman's in Kentish Town!⁹ But, she implored, pity. Pity, for the loss of roses. Pity she asked of Maisie Johnson, standing by the hyacinth beds.

Ah, but that aeroplane! Hadn't Mrs. Dempster always longed to see foreign parts? She had a nephew, a missionary. It soared and shot. She always went on the sea at Margate,¹ not out o' sight of land, but she had no patience with women who were afraid of water. It swept and fell. Her stomach was in her mouth. Up again. There's a fine young feller aboard of it, Mrs. Dempster wagered, and away and away it went, fast and fading, away and away the aeroplane shot; soaring over Greenwich² and all the masts; over the little island of grey churches, St. Paul's³ and the rest till, on either side of London, fields spread out and dark brown woods where adventurous thrushes hopping boldly, glancing quickly, snatched the snail and tapped him on a stone, once, twice, thrice.

Away and away the aeroplane shot, till it was nothing but a bright spark; an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol (so it seemed to Mr. Bentley, vigorously rolling his strip of turf at Greenwich) of man's soul; of his determination, thought Mr. Bentley, sweeping round the cedar tree, to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought, Einstein,⁴ speculation,⁵ mathematics, the Mendelian theory⁶—away the aeroplane shot.

Then, while a seedy-looking nondescript man carrying a leather bag stood on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, and hesitated, for within was what balm, how great a welcome, how many tombs with banners waving over them, tokens of victories not over armies, but over, he thought, that plaguy spirit of truth seeking which leaves me at present without a situation, and more than that, the cathedral offers company, he thought, invites you to membership of a society; great men belong to it; martyrs have died for it; why not enter in, he thought, put this leather bag stuffed with pamphlets before an altar, a cross, the symbol of something which has soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together and has become all spirit, disembodied, ghostly—why not enter in? he thought and while he hesitated out flew the aeroplane over Ludgate Circus.⁷

It was strange; it was still. Not a sound was to be heard above the traffic. Unguided it seemed; sped of its own free will. And now, curving up and up, straight up, like something mounting in ecstasy, in pure delight, out from behind poured white smoke looping, writing a T, an O, an F.

"What are they looking at?" said Clarissa Dalloway to the maid who opened her door.

The hall of the house was cool as a vault. Mrs. Dalloway raised her hand to her eyes, and, as the maid shut the door to, and she heard the swish of Lucy's skirts, she felt like a nun who has left the world and feels fold round her the familiar veils and the response to old devotions. The cook whistled in the kitchen. She heard the click of the typewriter. It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her eyes only); not for a moment did she believe in God; but all the more, she thought, taking up the pad, must one repay in daily life to servants, yes, to dogs and canaries, above all to Richard her husband, who was the foundation of it—of the gay

sounds, of the green lights, of the cook even whistling, for Mrs. Walker was Irish and whistled all day long—one must pay back from this secret deposit of exquisite moments, she thought, lifting the pad, while Lucy stood by her, trying to explain how

“Mr. Dalloway, ma’am”—

Clarissa read on the telephone pad, “Lady Bruton wishes to know if Mr. Dalloway will lunch with her to-day.”

“Mr. Dalloway, ma’am, told me to tell you he would be lunching out.”

“Dear!” said Clarissa, and Lucy shared as she meant her to her disappointment (but not the pang); felt the concord between them; took the hint; thought how the gentry love; gilded her own future with calm; and, taking Mrs. Dalloway’s parasol, handled it like a sacred weapon which a Goddess, having acquitted herself honourably in the field of battle, sheds, and placed it in the umbrella stand.

“Fear no more,” said Clarissa. Fear no more the heat o’ the sun;⁸ for the shock of Lady Bruton asking Richard to lunch without her made the moment in which she had stood shiver, as a plant on the river-bed feels the shock of a passing oar and shivers: so she rocked: so she shivered.

Millicent Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. No vulgar jealousy could separate her from Richard. But she feared time itself, and read on Lady Bruton’s face, as if it had been a dial cut in impassive stone, the dwindling of life; how year by year her share was sliced; how little the margin that remained was capable any longer of stretching, of absorbing, as in the youthful years, the colours, salts, tones of existence, so that she filled the room she entered, and felt often as she stood hesitating one moment on the threshold of her drawing-room, an exquisite suspense, such as might stay a diver before plunging while the sea darkens and brightens beneath him, and the waves which threaten to break, but only gently split their surface, roll and conceal and encrust as they just turn over the weeds with pearl.

She put the pad on the hall table. She began to go slowly upstairs, with her hand on the bannisters, as if she had left a party, where now this friend now that had flashed back her face, her voice; had shut the door and gone out and stood alone, a single figure against the appalling night, or rather, to be accurate, against the stare of this matter-of-fact June morning; soft with the glow of rose petals for some, she knew, and felt it, as she paused by the open staircase window which let in blinds flapping, dogs barking, let in, she thought, feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her.

Like a nun withdrawing, or a child exploring a tower, she went upstairs, paused at the window, came to the bathroom. There was the green linoleum and a tap dripping. There was an emptiness about the heart of life; an attic room. Women must put off their rich apparel. At midday they must disrobe. She pierced the pincushion and laid her feathered yellow hat on the bed. The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be. The candle was half burnt down and she had read deep in Baron Marbot's *Memoirs*.⁹ She had read late at night of the retreat from Moscow. For the House sat so long that Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed. And really she preferred to read of the retreat from Moscow. He knew it. So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment—for example on the river beneath the woods at Cliveden—when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople,¹ and again and again. She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together.

For *that* she could dimly perceive. She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt, sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident—like a faint scent, or a violin next door (so strange is the power of sounds at certain moments), she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over—the moment. Against such moments (with women too) there contrasted (as she laid her hat down) the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt. Lying awake, the floor creaked; the lit house was suddenly darkened, and if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed!

But this question of love (she thought, putting her coat away), this falling in love with women. Take Sally Seton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seton. Had not that, after all, been love?

She sat on the floor—that was her first impression of Sally—she sat on the floor with her arms round her knees, smoking a cigarette. Where could it have been? The Mannings? The Kinloch-Jones's? At some party (where, she could not be certain), for she had a distinct recollection of saying to the man she was with, "Who is *that*?" And he had told her, and said that Sally's parents did not get on (how that shocked her—that one's parents should quarrel!). But all that evening she could not take her eyes off Sally. It was an

extraordinary beauty of the kind she most admired, dark, large-eyed, with that quality which, since she hadn't got it herself, she always envied—a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything; a quality much commoner in foreigners than in Englishwomen. Sally always said she had French blood in her veins, an ancestor had been with Marie Antoinette,² had his head cut off, left a ruby ring. Perhaps that summer she came to stay at Bourton, walking in quite unexpectedly without a penny in her pocket, one night after dinner, and upsetting poor Aunt Helena to such an extent that she never forgave her. There had been some quarrel at home. She literally hadn't a penny that night when she came to them—had pawned a brooch to come down. She had rushed off in a passion. They sat up till all hours of the night talking. Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was. She knew nothing about sex—nothing about social problems. She had once seen an old man who had dropped dead in a field—she had seen cows just after their calves were born. But Aunt Helena never liked discussion of anything (when Sally gave her William Morris,³ it had to be wrapped in brown paper). There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out. The ideas were Sally's, of course—but very soon she was just as excited—read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley⁴ by the hour.

Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias—all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together—cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water in bowls. The effect was extraordinary—coming in to dinner in the sunset (Of course Aunt Helena thought it wicked to treat flowers like that.) Then she forgot her sponge, and ran along the passage naked. That grim old housemaid, Ellen Atkins, went about grumbling

—“Suppose any of the gentlemen had seen?” Indeed she did shock people. She was untidy, Papa said.

The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one’s feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this chivalry, this protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally’s. For in those days she was completely reckless; did the most idiotic things out of bravado; bicycled round the parapet on the terrace; smoked cigars. Absurd, she was—very absurd. But the charm was overpowering, to her at least, so that she could remember standing in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud, “She is beneath this roof. . . . She is beneath this roof!”

No, the words meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion. But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy (now the old feeling began to come back to her, as she took out her hairpins, laid them on the dressing-table, began to do her hair), with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light, and dressing, and going downstairs, and feeling as she crossed the hall “if it were now to die ’twere now to be most happy.” That was her feeling—Othello’s feeling,⁵ and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!

She was wearing pink gauze—was that possible? She *seemed*, anyhow, all light, glowing, like some bird or air ball⁶ that has flown in, attached itself for a moment to a bramble. But nothing is so strange when one is in love (and what was this except being in love?) as the complete indifference of other people. Aunt Helena just wandered off after dinner; Papa read the paper. Peter Walsh might have been there, and old Miss Cummings; Joseph Breitkopf certainly

was, for he came every summer, poor old man, for weeks and weeks, and pretended to read German with her, but really played the piano and sang Brahms⁷ without any voice.

All this was only a background for Sally. She stood by the fireplace talking, in that beautiful voice which made everything she said sound like a caress, to Papa, who had begun to be attracted rather against his will (he never got over lending her one of his books and finding it soaked on the terrace), when suddenly she said, "What a shame to sit indoors!" and they all went out on to the terrace and walked up and down. Peter Walsh and Joseph Breitkopf went on about Wagner. She and Sally fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!—when old Joseph and Peter faced them:

"Star-gazing?" said Peter.

It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!

Not for herself. She felt only how Sally was being mauled already, maltreated; she felt his hostility; his jealousy; his determination to break into their companionship. All this she saw as one sees a landscape in a flash of lightning—and Sally (never had she admired her so much!) gallantly taking her way unvanquished. She laughed. She made old Joseph tell her the names of the stars, which he liked doing very seriously. She stood there: she listened. She heard the names of the stars.

"Oh this horror!" she said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness.

Yet, after all, how much she owed to him later. Always when she thought of him she thought of their quarrels for some reason—because she wanted his good opinion so much, perhaps. She owed him words: “sentimental,” “civilised”; they started up every day of her life as if he guarded her. A book was sentimental; an attitude to life sentimental. “Sentimental,” perhaps she was to be thinking of the past. What would he think, she wondered, when he came back?

That she had grown older? Would he say that, or would she see him thinking when he came back, that she had grown older? It was true. Since her illness she had turned almost white.

Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm, as if, while she mused, the icy claws had had the chance to fix in her. She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself.

How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked in the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self—pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps; she had helped young people, who were grateful to her; had tried to be the same always, never showing a sign of all the other sides of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions, like this of Lady Bruton not asking

her to lunch; which, she thought (combing her hair finally), is utterly base! Now, where was her dress?

Her evening dresses hung in the cupboard. Clarissa, plunging her hand into the softness, gently detached the green dress and carried it to the window. She had torn it. Some one had trod on the skirt. She had felt it give at the Embassy party at the top among the folds. By artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour now in the sun. She would mend it. Her maids had too much to do. She would wear it to-night. She would take her silks, her scissors, her—what was it?—her thimble, of course, down into the drawing-room, for she must also write, and see that things generally were more or less in order.

Strange, she thought, pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person, strange how a mistress knows the very moment, the very temper of her house! Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs; the swish of a mop; tapping; knocking; a loudness when the front door opened; a voice repeating a message in the basement; the chink of silver on a tray, clean silver for the party. All was for the party.

(And Lucy, coming into the drawing-room with her tray held out, put the giant candlesticks on the mantelpiece, the silver casket⁸ in the middle, turned the crystal dolphin towards the clock. They would come; they would stand; they would talk in the mincing tones which she could imitate, ladies and gentlemen. Of all, her mistress was loveliest—mistress of silver, of linen, of china, for the sun, the silver, doors off their hinges, Rumpelmayer's men, gave her a sense, as she laid the paper-knife⁹ on the inlaid table, of something achieved. Behold! Behold! she said, speaking to her old friends in the baker's shop, where she had first seen service at Caterham,¹ prying into the glass. She was Lady Angela, attending Princess Mary, when in came Mrs. Dalloway.)

"Oh Lucy," she said, "the silver does look nice!"

"And how," she said, turning the crystal dolphin to stand straight, "how did you enjoy the play last night?" "Oh, they had to go before the end!" she said. "They had to be back at ten!" she said. "So they don't know what happened," she said. "That does seem hard luck,"

she said (for her servants stayed later, if they asked her). "That does seem rather a shame," she said, taking the old bald-looking cushion in the middle of the sofa and putting it in Lucy's arms, and giving her a little push, and crying:

"Take it away! Give it to Mrs. Walker with my compliments! Take it away!" she cried.

And Lucy stopped at the drawing-room door, holding the cushion, and said, very shyly, turning a little pink, Couldn't she help to mend that dress?

But, said Mrs. Dalloway, she had enough on her hands already, quite enough of her own to do without that.

"But, thank you, Lucy, oh, thank you," said Mrs. Dalloway, and thank you, thank you, she went on saying (sitting down on the sofa with her dress over her knees, her scissors, her silks), thank you, thank you, she went on saying in gratitude to her servants generally for helping her to be like this, to be what she wanted, gentle, generous-hearted. Her servants liked her. And then this dress of hers—where was the tear? and now her needle to be threaded. This was a favourite dress, one of Sally Parker's, the last almost she ever made, alas, for Sally had now retired, living at Ealing,² and if ever I have a moment, thought Clarissa (but never would she have a moment any more), I shall go and see her at Ealing. For she was a character, thought Clarissa, a real artist. She thought of little out-of-the-way things; yet her dresses were never queer. You could wear them at Hatfield;³ at Buckingham Palace. She had worn them at Hatfield; at Buckingham Palace.

Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly, to the belt. So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying "that is all" more and more ponderously, until even the heart in the body which lies in the sun on the beach says too, That is all. Fear no more, says the heart. Fear no more, says the heart, committing its burden to some sea, which sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets

fall. And the body alone listens to the passing bee; the wave breaking; the dog barking, far away barking and barking.

"Heavens, the front-door bell!" exclaimed Clarissa, staying her needle. Roused, she listened.

"Mrs. Dalloway will see me," said the elderly man in the hall. "Oh yes, she will see *me*," he repeated, putting Lucy aside very benevolently, and running upstairs ever so quickly. "Yes, yes, yes," he muttered as he ran upstairs. "She will see me. After five years in India,⁴ Clarissa will see me."

"Who can—what can," asked Mrs. Dalloway (thinking it was outrageous to be interrupted at eleven o'clock on the morning of the day she was giving a party), hearing a step on the stairs. She heard a hand upon the door. She made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy. Now the brass knob slipped. Now the door opened, and in came—for a single second she could not remember what he was called! so surprised she was to see him, so glad, so shy, so utterly taken aback to have Peter Walsh come to her unexpectedly in the morning! (She had not read his letter.)

"And how are you?" said Peter Walsh, positively trembling; taking both her hands; kissing both her hands. She's grown older, he thought, sitting down. I shan't tell her anything about it, he thought, for she's grown older. She's looking at me, he thought, a sudden embarrassment coming over him, though he had kissed her hands. Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out a large pocket-knife and half opened the blade.

Exactly the same, thought Clarissa; the same queer look; the same check suit; a little out of the straight his face is, a little thinner, dryer, perhaps, but he looks awfully well, and just the same.

"How heavenly it is to see you again!" she exclaimed. He had his knife out. That's so like him, she thought.

He had only reached town last night, he said; would have to go down into the country at once; and how was everything, how was everybody—Richard? Elizabeth?

"And what's all this?" he said, tilting his pen-knife towards her green dress.

He's very well dressed, thought Clarissa; yet he always criticises *me*.

Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual, he thought; here she's been sitting all the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard. So it is, so it is, he thought, shutting his knife with a snap.

"Richard's very well. Richard's at a Committee,"⁵ said Clarissa.

And she opened her scissors, and said, did he mind her just finishing what she was doing to her dress, for they had a party that night?

"Which I shan't ask you to," she said. "My dear Peter!" she said.

But it was delicious to hear her say that—my dear Peter! Indeed, it was all so delicious—the silver, the chairs; all so delicious!

Why wouldn't she ask him to her party? he asked.

Now of course, thought Clarissa, he's enchanting! perfectly enchanting! Now I remember how impossible it was ever to make up my mind—and why did I make up my mind—not to marry him? she wondered, that awful summer?

"But it's so extraordinary that you should have come this morning!" she cried, putting her hands, one on top of another, down on her dress.

"Do you remember," she said, "how the blinds used to flap at Bourton?"

"They did," he said; and he remembered breakfasting alone, very awkwardly, with her father; who had died; and he had not written to Clarissa. But he had never got on well with old Parry, that querulous, weak-kneed old man, Clarissa's father, Justin Parry.

"I often wish I'd got on better with your father," he said.

"But he never liked any one who—our friends," said Clarissa; and could have bitten her tongue for thus reminding Peter that he had

wanted to marry her.

Of course I did, thought Peter; it almost broke my heart too, he thought; and was overcome with his own grief, which rose like a moon looked at from a terrace, ghastly beautiful with light from the sunken day. I was more unhappy than I've ever been since, he thought. And as if in truth he were sitting there on the terrace he edged a little towards Clarissa; put his hand out; raised it; let it fall. There above them it hung, that moon. She too seemed to be sitting with him on the terrace, in the moonlight.

"Herbert has it now," she said. "I never go there now," she said.

Then, just as happens on a terrace in the moonlight, when one person begins to feel ashamed that he is already bored, and yet as the other sits silent, very quiet, sadly looking at the moon, does not like to speak, moves his foot, clears his throat, notices some iron scroll on a table leg, stirs a leaf, but says nothing—so Peter Walsh did now. For why go back like this to the past? he thought. Why make him think of it again? Why make him suffer, when she had tortured him so infernally? Why?

"Do you remember the lake?" she said, in an abrupt voice, under the pressure of an emotion which caught her heart, made the muscles of her throat stiff, and contracted her lips in a spasm as she said "lake." For she was a child, throwing bread to the ducks, between her parents, and at the same time a grown woman coming to her parents who stood by the lake, holding her life in her arms which, as she neared them, grew larger and larger in her arms, until it became a whole life, a complete life, which she put down by them and said, "This is what I have made of it! This!" And what had she made of it? What, indeed? sitting there sewing this morning with Peter.

She looked at Peter Walsh; her look, passing through all that time and that emotion, reached him doubtfully; settled on him tearfully; and rose and fluttered away, as a bird touches a branch and rises and flutters away. Quite simply she wiped her eyes.

"Yes," said Peter. "Yes, yes, yes," he said, as if she drew up to the surface something which positively hurt him as it rose. Stop! Stop!

he wanted to cry. For he was not old; his life was not over; not by any means. He was only just past fifty. Shall I tell her, he thought, or not? He would like to make a clean breast of it all. But she is too cold, he thought; sewing, with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloways' sense. Oh yes, he had no doubt about that; he was a failure, compared with all this—the inlaid table, the mounted paper-knife, the dolphin and the candlesticks, the chair-covers and the old valuable English tinted prints—he was a failure! I detest the smugness of the whole affair, he thought; Richard's doing, not Clarissa's; save that she married him. (Here Lucy came into the room, carrying silver, more silver, but charming, slender, graceful she looked, he thought, as she stooped to put it down.) And this has been going on all the time! he thought; week after week; Clarissa's life; while I—he thought; and at once everything seemed to radiate from him; journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work; work, work! and he took out his knife quite openly—his old horn-handled knife which Clarissa could swear he had had these thirty years—and clenched his fist upon it.

What an extraordinary habit that was, Clarissa thought; always playing with a knife. Always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox, as he used. But I too, she thought, and, taking up her needle, summoned, like a Queen whose guards have fallen asleep and left her unprotected (she had been quite taken aback by this visit—it had upset her) so that any one can stroll in and have a look at her where she lies with the brambles curving over her, summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; her self, in short, which Peter hardly knew now, all to come about her and beat off the enemy.

"Well, and what's happened to you?" she said. So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him. He assembled from different

quarters all sorts of things; praise; his career at Oxford; his marriage, which she knew nothing whatever about; how he had loved; and altogether done his job.

"Millions of things!" he exclaimed, and, urged by the assembly of powers which were now charging this way and that and giving him the feeling at once frightening and extremely exhilarating of being rushed through the air on the shoulders of people he could no longer see, he raised his hands to his forehead.

Clarissa sat very upright; drew in her breath.

"I am in love," he said, not to her however, but to some one raised up in the dark so that you could not touch her but must lay your garland down on the grass in the dark.

"In love," he repeated, now speaking rather dryly to Clarissa Dalloway; "in love with a girl in India." He had deposited his garland. Clarissa could make what she would of it.

"In love!" she said. That he at his age should be sucked under in his little bow-tie by that monster! And there's no flesh on his neck; his hands are red; and he's six months older than I am! her eye flashed back to her; but in her heart she felt, all the same, he is in love. He has that, she felt; he is in love.

But the indomitable egotism which for ever rides down the hosts opposed to it, the river which says on, on, on; even though, it admits, there may be no goal for us whatever, still on, on; this indomitable egotism charged her cheeks with colour; made her look very young; very pink; very bright-eyed as she sat with her dress upon her knee, and her needle held to the end of green silk, trembling a little. He was in love! Not with her. With some younger woman, of course.

"And who is she?" she asked.

Now this statue must be brought from its height and set down between them.

"A married woman, unfortunately," he said; "the wife of a Major in the Indian Army."

And with a curious ironical sweetness he smiled as he placed her in this ridiculous way before Clarissa.

(All the same, he is in love, thought Clarissa.)

"She has," he continued, very reasonably, "two small children; a boy and a girl; and I have come over to see my lawyers about the divorce."

There they are! he thought. Do what you like with them, Clarissa! There they are! And second by second it seemed to him that the wife of the Major in the Indian Army⁶ (his Daisy) and her two small children became more and more lovely as Clarissa looked at them; as if he had set light to a grey pellet on a plate and there had risen up a lovely tree in the brisk sea-salted air of their intimacy (for in some ways no one understood him, felt with him, as Clarissa did)—their exquisite intimacy.

She flattered him; she fooled him, thought Clarissa; shaping the woman, the wife of the Major in the Indian Army, with three strokes of a knife. What a waste! What a folly! All his life long Peter had been fooled like that; first getting sent down from Oxford;⁷ next marrying the girl on the boat going out to India; now the wife of a Major in the Indian Army—thank Heaven she had refused to marry him! Still, he was in love; her old friend, her dear Peter, he was in love.

"But what are you going to do?" she asked him. Oh the lawyers and solicitors, Messrs. Hooper and Grateley of Lincoln's Inn,⁸ they were going to do it, he said. And he actually pared his nails with his pocket-knife.

For Heaven's sake, leave your knife alone! she cried to herself in irrepressible irritation; it was his silly unconventionality, his weakness; his lack of the ghost of a notion what any one else was feeling that annoyed her, had always annoyed her; and now at his age, how silly!

I know all that, Peter thought; I know what I'm up against, he thought, running his finger along the blade of his knife, Clarissa and Dalloway and all the rest of them; but I'll show Clarissa—and then to his utter surprise, suddenly thrown by those uncontrollable forces thrown through the air, he burst into tears; wept; wept without the least shame, sitting on the sofa, the tears running down his cheeks.

And Clarissa had leant forward, taken his hand, drawn him to her, kissed him,—actually had felt his face on hers before she could down the brandishing of silver flashing—plumes like pampas grass in a tropic gale in her breast, which, subsiding, left her holding his hand, patting his knee and, feeling as she sat back extraordinarily at her ease with him and light-hearted, all in a clap it came over her, If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day!

It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow. She had gone up into the tower alone and left them blackberrying in the sun. The door had shut, and there among the dust of fallen plaster and the litter of birds' nests how distant the view had looked, and the sounds came thin and chill (once on Leith Hill,⁹ she remembered), and Richard, Richard! she cried, as a sleeper in the night starts and stretches a hand in the dark for help. Lunching with Lady Bruton, it came back to her. He has left me; I am alone for ever, she thought, folding her hands upon her knee.

Peter Walsh had got up and crossed to the window and stood with his back to her, flicking a bandanna handkerchief from side to side. Masterly and dry and desolate he looked, his thin shoulder-blades lifting his coat slightly; blowing his nose violently. Take me with you, Clarissa thought impulsively, as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage; and then, next moment, it was as if the five acts of a play that had been very exciting and moving were now over and she had lived a lifetime in them and had run away, had lived with Peter, and it was now over.

Now it was time to move, and, as a woman gathers her things together, her cloak, her gloves, her opera-glasses, and gets up to go out of the theatre into the street, she rose from the sofa and went to Peter.

And it was awfully strange, he thought, how she still had the power, as she came tinkling, rustling, still had the power as she came across the room, to make the moon, which he detested, rise at Bourton on the terrace in the summer sky.

"Tell me," he said, seizing her by the shoulders. "Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard—"

The door opened.

"Here is my Elizabeth," said Clarissa, emotionally, histrionically, perhaps.

"How d'y do?" said Elizabeth coming forward.

The sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour struck out between them with extraordinary vigour, as if a young man, strong, indifferent, inconsiderate, were swinging dumb-bells this way and that.

"Hullo, Elizabeth!" cried Peter, stuffing his handkerchief into his pocket, going quickly to her, saying "Good-bye, Clarissa" without looking at her, leaving the room quickly, and running downstairs and opening the hall door.

"Peter! Peter!" cried Clarissa, following him out on to the landing. "My party to-night! Remember my party to-night!" she cried, having to raise her voice against the roar of the open air, and, overwhelmed by the traffic and the sound of all the clocks striking, her voice crying "Remember my party to-night!" sounded frail and thin and very far away as Peter Walsh shut the door.

Remember my party, remember my party, said Peter Walsh as he stepped down the street, speaking to himself rhythmically, in time with the flow of the sound, the direct downright sound of Big Ben striking the half-hour. (The leaden circles dissolved in the air.) Oh these parties, he thought; Clarissa's parties. Why does she give these parties, he thought. Not that he blamed her or this effigy of a man in a tail-coat with a carnation in his button-hole coming towards him. Only one person in the world could be as he was, in love. And there he was, this fortunate man, himself, reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer in Victoria Street. All India lay behind him; plains, mountains; epidemics of cholera; a district twice as big as Ireland; decisions he had come to alone—he, Peter Walsh; who was now really for the first time in his life, in love. Clarissa had grown hard, he thought; and a trifle sentimental into the bargain, he suspected, looking at the great motor-cars capable of doing—how many miles on how many gallons? For he had a turn for mechanics;

had invented a plough in his district, had ordered wheel-barrows from England, but the coolies¹ wouldn't use them, all of which Clarissa knew nothing whatever about.

The way she said "Here is my Elizabeth!"—that annoyed him. Why not "Here's Elizabeth" simply? It was insincere. And Elizabeth didn't like it either. (Still the last tremors of the great booming voice shook the air round him; the half-hour; still early; only half-past eleven still.) For he understood young people; he liked them. There was always something cold in Clarissa, he thought. She had always, even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality, and then it's all up, it's all up, he thought, looking rather drearily into the glassy depths, and wondering whether by calling at that hour he had annoyed her; overcome with shame suddenly at having been a fool; wept; been emotional; told her everything, as usual, as usual.

As a cloud crosses the sun, silence falls on London; and falls on the mind. Effort ceases. Time flaps on the mast. There we stop; there we stand. Rigid, the skeleton of habit alone upholds the human frame. Where there is nothing, Peter Walsh said to himself; feeling hollowed out, utterly empty within. Clarissa refused me, he thought. He stood there thinking, Clarissa refused me.

Ah, said St. Margaret's,² like a hostess who comes into her drawing-room on the very stroke of the hour and finds her guests there already. I am not late. No, it is precisely half-past eleven, she says. Yet, though she is perfectly right, her voice, being the voice of the hostess, is reluctant to inflict its individuality. Some grief for the past holds it back; some concern for the present. It is half-past eleven, she says, and the sound of St. Margaret's glides into the recesses of the heart and buries itself in ring after ring of sound, like something alive which wants to confide itself, to disperse itself, to be, with a tremor of delight, at rest—like Clarissa herself, thought Peter Walsh, coming down the stairs on the stroke of the hour in white. It is Clarissa herself, he thought, with a deep emotion, and an extraordinarily clear, yet puzzling, recollection of her, as if this bell had come into the room years ago, where they sat at some moment

of great intimacy, and had gone from one to the other and had left, like a bee with honey, laden with the moment. But what room? What moment? And why had he been so profoundly happy when the clock was striking? Then, as the sound of St. Margaret's languished, he thought, She has been ill, and the sound expressed languor and suffering. It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried, and marched up Whitehall,³ as if there rolled down to him, vigorous, unending, his future.

He was not old, or set, or dried in the least. As for caring what they said of him—the Dalloways, the Whitbreads, and their set, he cared not a straw—not a straw (though it was true he would have, some time or other, to see whether Richard couldn't help him to some job). Striding, staring, he glared at the statue of the Duke of Cambridge.⁴ He had been sent down from Oxford—true. He had been a Socialist, in some sense a failure—true. Still the future of civilisation lies, he thought, in the hands of young men like that; of young men such as he was, thirty years ago; with their love of abstract principles; getting books sent out to them all the way from London to a peak in the Himalayas; reading science; reading philosophy. The future lies in the hands of young men like that, he thought.

A patter like the patter of leaves in a wood came from behind, and with it a rustling, regular thudding sound, which as it overtook him drummed his thoughts, strict in step, up Whitehall, without his doing. Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England.

It is, thought Peter Walsh, beginning to keep step with them, a very fine training. But they did not look robust. They were weedy for the most part, boys of sixteen, who might, tomorrow, stand behind bowls of rice, cakes of soap on counters. Now they wore on them

unmixed with sensual pleasure or daily preoccupations the solemnity of the wreath which they had fetched from Finsbury Pavement to the empty tomb.⁵ They had taken their vow. The traffic respected it; vans were stopped.

I can't keep up with them, Peter Walsh thought, as they marched up Whitehall, and sure enough, on they marched, past him, past every one, in their steady way, as if one will worked legs and arms uniformly, and life, with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline. One had to respect it; one might laugh; but one had to respect it, he thought. There they go, thought Peter Walsh, pausing at the edge of the pavement; and all the exalted statues, Nelson, Gordon, Havelock, the black, the spectacular images of great soldiers⁶ stood looking ahead of them, as if they too had made the same renunciation (Peter Walsh felt he too had made it, the great renunciation), trampled under the same temptations, and achieved at length a marble stare. But the stare Peter Walsh did not want for himself in the least; though he could respect it in others. He could respect it in boys. They don't know the troubles of the flesh yet, he thought, as the marching boys disappeared in the direction of the Strand⁷—all that I've been through, he thought, crossing the road, and standing under Gordon's statue, Gordon whom as a boy he had worshipped; Gordon standing lonely with one leg raised and his arms crossed,—poor Gordon, he thought.

And just because nobody yet knew he was in London, except Clarissa, and the earth, after the voyage, still seemed an island to him, the strangeness of standing alone, alive, unknown, at half-past eleven in Trafalgar Square overcame him. What is it? Where am I? And why, after all, does one do it? he thought, the divorce seeming all moonshine. And down his mind went flat as a marsh, and three great emotions bowled over him; understanding; a vast philanthropy; and finally, as if the result of the others, an irrepressible, exquisite delight; as if inside his brain by another hand strings were pulled, shutters moved, and he, having nothing to do

with it, yet stood at the opening of endless avenues, down which if he chose he might wander. He had not felt so young for years.

He had escaped! was utterly free—as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its holding. I haven't felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was, and feeling like a child who runs out of doors, and sees, as he runs, his old nurse waving at the wrong window. But she's extraordinarily attractive, he thought, as, walking across Trafalgar Square in the direction of the Haymarket,⁸ came a young woman who, as she passed Gordon's statue, seemed, Peter Walsh thought (susceptible as he was), to shed veil after veil, until she became the very woman he had always had in mind; young, but stately; merry, but discreet, black,⁹ but enchanting.

Straightening himself and stealthily fingering his pocket-knife he started after her to follow this woman, this excitement, which seemed even with its back turned to shed on him a light which connected them, which singled him out, as if the random uproar of the traffic had whispered through hollowed hands his name, not Peter, but his private name which he called himself in his own thoughts. "You," she said, only "you," saying it with her white gloves and her shoulders. Then the thin long cloak which the wind stirred as she walked past Dent's shop in Cockspur Street¹ blew out with an enveloping kindness, a mournful tenderness, as of arms that would open and take the tired—

But she's not married; she's young; quite young, thought Peter, the red carnation he had seen her wear as she came across Trafalgar Square burning again in his eyes and making her lips red. But she waited at the kerbstone. There was a dignity about her. She was not worldly, like Clarissa; not rich, like Clarissa. Was she, he wondered as she moved, respectable? Witty, with a lizard's flickering tongue, he thought (for one must invent, must allow oneself a little diversion), a cool waiting wit, a darting wit; not noisy.

She moved; she crossed; he followed her. To embarrass her was the last thing he wished. Still if she stopped he would say "Come

and have an ice," he would say, and she would answer, perfectly simply, "Oh yes."

But other people got between them in the street, obstructing him, blotting her out. He pursued; she changed. There was colour in her cheeks; mockery in her eyes; he was an adventurer, reckless, he thought, swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer, careless of all these damned proprieties, yellow dressing-gowns, pipes, fishing-rods, in the shop windows; and respectability and evening parties and spruce old men wearing white slips beneath their waistcoats. He was a buccaneer.² On and on she went, across Piccadilly, and up Regent Street, ahead of him, her cloak, her gloves, her shoulders combining with the fringes and the laces and the feather boas in the windows to make the spirit of finery and whimsy which dwindled out of the shops on to the pavement, as the light of a lamp goes wavering at night over hedges in the darkness.

Laughing and delightful, she had crossed Oxford Street and Great Portland Street³ and turned down one of the little streets, and now, and now, the great moment was approaching, for now she slackened, opened her bag, and with one look in his direction, but not at him, one look that bade farewell, summed up the whole situation and dismissed it triumphantly, for ever, had fitted her key, opened the door, and gone! Clarissa's voice saying, Remember my party, Remember my party, sang in his ears. The house was one of those flat red houses with hanging flower-baskets of vague impropriety. It was over.

Well, I've had my fun; I've had it, he thought, looking up at the swinging baskets of pale geraniums. And it was smashed to atoms—his fun, for it was half made up, as he knew very well; invented, this escapade with the girl; made up, as one makes up the better part of life, he thought—making oneself up; making her up; creating an exquisite amusement, and something more. But odd it was, and quite true; all this one could never share—it smashed to atoms.

He turned; went up the street, thinking to find somewhere to sit, till it was time for Lincoln's Inn—for Messrs. Hooper and Grateley.

Where should he go? No matter. Up the street, then, towards Regent's Park. His boots on the pavement struck out "no matter"; for it was early, still very early.

It was a splendid morning too. Like the pulse of a perfect heart, life struck straight through the streets. There was no fumbling—no hesitation. Sweeping and swerving, accurately, punctually, noiselessly, there, precisely at the right instant, the motor-car stopped at the door. The girl, silk-stockinged, feathered, evanescent, but not to him particularly attractive (for he had had his fling), alighted. Admirable butlers, tawny chow dogs, halls laid in black and white lozenges⁴ with white blinds blowing, Peter saw through the opened door and approved of. A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilisation. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family⁵ which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it's strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession; moments of pride in England; in butlers; chow dogs; girls in their security. Ridiculous enough, still there it is, he thought. And the doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to him wholly admirable, good fellows, to whom one would entrust one's life, companions in the art of living, who would see one through. What with one thing and another, the show was really very tolerable; and he would sit down in the shade and smoke.

There was Regent's Park. Yes. As a child he had walked in Regent's Park—odd, he thought, how the thought of childhood keeps coming back to me—the result of seeing Clarissa, perhaps; for women live much more in the past than we do, he thought. They attach themselves to places; and their fathers—a woman's always proud of her father. Bourton was a nice place, a very nice place, but I could never get on with the old man, he thought. There was quite a scene one night—an argument about something or other, what, he could not remember. Politics presumably.

Yes, he remembered Regent's Park; the long straight walk; the little house where one bought air-balls to the left; an absurd statue with an inscription⁶ somewhere or other. He looked for an empty seat. He did not want to be bothered (feeling a little drowsy as he did) by people asking him the time. An elderly grey nurse, with a baby asleep in its perambulator—that was the best he could do for himself; sit down at the far end of the seat by that nurse.

She's a queer-looking girl, he thought, suddenly remembering Elizabeth as she came into the room and stood by her mother. Grown big; quite grown-up, not exactly pretty; handsome rather; and she can't be more than eighteen. Probably she doesn't get on with Clarissa. "There's my Elizabeth"—that sort of thing—why not "Here's Elizabeth" simply?—trying to make out, like most mothers, that things are what they're not. She trusts to her charm too much, he thought. She overdoes it.

The rich benignant cigar smoke eddied coolly down his throat; he puffed it out again in rings which breasted the air bravely for a moment; blue, circular—I shall try and get a word alone with Elizabeth to-night, he thought—then began to wobble into hour-glass shapes and taper away; odd shapes they take, he thought. Suddenly he closed his eyes, raised his hand with an effort, and threw away the heavy end of his cigar. A great brush swept smooth across his mind, sweeping across it moving branches, children's voices, the shuffle of feet, and people passing, and humming traffic, rising and falling traffic. Down, down he sank into the plumes and feathers of sleep, sank, and was muffled over.

The grey nurse resumed her knitting as Peter Walsh, on the hot seat beside her, began snoring. In her grey dress, moving her hands indefatigably yet quietly, she seemed like the champion of the rights of sleepers, like one of those spectral presences which rise in twilight in woods made of sky and branches. The solitary traveller, haunter of lanes, disturber of ferns, and devastator of great hemlock plants, looking up, suddenly sees the giant figure at the end of the ride.

By conviction an atheist perhaps, he is taken by surprise with moments of extraordinary exaltation. Nothing exists outside us except a state of mind, he thinks; a desire for solace, for relief, for something outside these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women. But if he can conceive of her, then in some sort she exists, he thinks, and advancing down the path with his eyes upon sky and branches he rapidly endows them with womanhood; sees with amazement how grave they become; how majestically, as the breeze stirs them, they dispense with a dark flutter of the leaves charity, comprehension, absolution, and then, flinging themselves suddenly aloft, confound the piety of their aspect with a wild carouse.

Such are the visions which proffer great cornucopias full of fruit to the solitary traveller, or murmur in his ear like sirens lolloping away on the green sea waves, or are dashed in his face like bunches of roses, or rise to the surface like pale faces which fishermen flounder through floods to embrace.

Such are the visions which ceaselessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth, the wish to return, and giving him for substitute a general peace, as if (so he thinks as he advances down the forest ride) all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea (he is elderly, past fifty now) as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution. So, he thinks, may I never go back to the lamplight; to the sitting-room; never finish my book; never knock out my pipe; never ring for Mrs. Turner to clear away; rather let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest.

Such are the visions. The solitary traveller is soon beyond the wood; and there, coming to the door with shaded eyes, possibly to look for his return, with hands raised, with white apron blowing, is

an elderly woman who seems (so powerful is this infirmity) to seek, over a desert, a lost son; to search for a rider destroyed; to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world. So, as the solitary traveller advances down the village street where the women stand knitting and the men dig in the garden, the evening seems ominous; the figures still; as if some august fate, known to them, awaited without fear, were about to sweep them into complete annihilation.

Indoors among ordinary things, the cupboard, the table, the window-sill with its geraniums, suddenly the outline of the landlady, bending to remove the cloth, becomes soft with light, an adorable emblem which only the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us to embrace. She takes the marmalade; she shuts it in the cupboard.

"There is nothing more to-night, sir?"

But to whom does the solitary traveller make reply?

So the elderly nurse knitted over the sleeping baby in Regent's Park. So Peter Walsh snored.

He woke with extreme suddenness, saying to himself, "The death of the soul."

"Lord, Lord!" he said to himself out loud, stretching and opening his eyes. "The death of the soul." The words attached themselves to some scene, to some room, to some past he had been dreaming of. It became clearer; the scene, the room, the past he had been dreaming of.

It was at Bourton that summer, early in the 'nineties, when he was so passionately in love with Clarissa. There were a great many people there, laughing and talking, sitting round a table after tea and the room was bathed in yellow light and full of cigarette smoke. They were talking about a man who had married his housemaid, one of the neighbouring squires, he had forgotten his name. He had married his housemaid, and she had been brought to Bourton to call—an awful visit it had been. She was absurdly over-dressed, "like a cockatoo," Clarissa had said, imitating her, and she never stopped

talking. On and on she went, on and on. Clarissa imitated her. Then somebody said—Sally Seton it was—did it make any real difference to one's feelings to know that before they'd married she had had a baby? (In those days, in mixed company, it was a bold thing to say.) He could see Clarissa now, turning bright pink; somehow contracting; and saying, "Oh, I shall never be able to speak to her again!" Whereupon the whole party sitting round the tea-table seemed to wobble. It was very uncomfortable.

He hadn't blamed her for minding the fact, since in those days a girl brought up as she was, knew nothing, but it was her manner that annoyed him; timid; hard; something arrogant; unimaginative; prudish. "The death of the soul." He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do—the death of her soul.

Every one wobbled; every one seemed to bow, as she spoke, and then to stand up different. He could see Sally Seton, like a child who has been in mischief, leaning forward, rather flushed, wanting to talk, but afraid, and Clarissa did frighten people. (She was Clarissa's greatest friend, always about the place, totally unlike her, an attractive creature, handsome, dark, with the reputation in those days of great daring and he used to give her cigars, which she smoked in her bedroom. She had either been engaged to somebody or quarrelled with her family and old Parry disliked them both equally, which was a great bond.) Then Clarissa, still with an air of being offended with them all, got up, made some excuse, and went off, alone. As she opened the door, in came that great shaggy dog which ran after sheep. She flung herself upon him, went into raptures. It was as if she said to Peter—it was all aimed at him, he knew—"I know you thought me absurd about that woman just now; but see how extraordinarily sympathetic I am; see how I love my Rob!"

They had always this queer power of communicating without words. She knew directly he criticised her. Then she would do something quite obvious to defend herself, like this fuss with the dog—but it never took him in, he always saw through Clarissa. Not that

he said anything, of course; just sat looking glum. It was the way their quarrels often began.

She shut the door. At once he became extremely depressed. It all seemed useless—going on being in love; going on quarrelling; going on making it up, and he wandered off alone, among outhouses, stables, looking at the horses. (The place was quite a humble one; the Parrys were never very well off; but there were always grooms and stable-boys about—Clarissa loved riding—and an old coachman—what was his name?—an old nurse, old Moody, old Goody, some such name they called her, whom one was taken to visit in a little room with lots of photographs, lots of bird-cages.)

It was an awful evening! He grew more and more gloomy, not about that only; about everything. And he couldn't see her; couldn't explain to her; couldn't have it out. There were always people about—she'd go on as if nothing had happened. That was the devilish part of her—this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability. Yet Heaven knows he loved her. She had some queer power of fiddling on one's nerves, turning one's nerves to fiddle-strings, yes.

He had gone in to dinner rather late, from some idiotic idea of making himself felt, and had sat down by old Miss Parry—Aunt Helena—Mr. Parry's sister, who was supposed to preside. There she sat in her white Cashmere shawl, with her head against the window—a formidable old lady, but kind to him, for he had found her some rare flower, and she was a great botanist, marching off in thick boots with a black collecting-box slung between her shoulders. He sat down beside her, and couldn't speak. Everything seemed to race past him; he just sat there, eating. And then half-way through dinner he made himself look across at Clarissa for the first time. She was talking to a young man on her right. He had a sudden revelation. "She will marry that man," he said to himself. He didn't even know his name.

For of course it was that afternoon, that very afternoon, that Dalloway had come over; and Clarissa called him "Wickham"; that

was the beginning of it all. Somebody had brought him over; and Clarissa got his name wrong. She introduced him to everybody as Wickham.⁷ At last he said "My name is Dalloway!"—that was his first view of Richard—a fair young man, rather awkward, sitting on a deck-chair, and blurting out "My name is Dalloway!" Sally got hold of it; always after that she called him "My name is Dalloway!"

He was a prey to revelations at that time. This one—that she would marry Dalloway—was blinding—overwhelming at the moment. There was a sort of—how could he put it?—a sort of ease in her manner to him; something maternal; something gentle. They were talking about politics. All through dinner he tried to hear what they were saying.

Afterwards he could remember standing by old Miss Parry's chair in the drawing-room. Clarissa came up, with her perfect manners, like a real hostess, and wanted to introduce him to some one—spoke as if they had never met before, which enraged him. Yet even then he admired her for it. He admired her courage; her social instinct; he admired her power of carrying things through. "The perfect hostess," he said to her, whereupon she winced all over. But he meant her to feel it. He would have done anything to hurt her after seeing her with Dalloway. So she left him. And he had a feeling that they were all gathered together in a conspiracy against him—laughing and talking—behind his back. There he stood by Miss Parry's chair as though he had been cut out of wood, he talking about wild flowers. Never, never had he suffered so infernally! He must have forgotten even to pretend to listen; at last he woke up; he saw Miss Parry looking rather disturbed, rather indignant, with her prominent eyes fixed. He almost cried out that he couldn't attend because he was in Hell! People began going out of the room. He heard them talking about fetching cloaks; about its being cold on the water, and so on. They were going boating on the lake by moonlight—one of Sally's mad ideas. He could hear her describing the moon. And they all went out. He was left quite alone.

"Don't you want to go with them?" said Aunt Helena—old Miss Parry!—she had guessed. And he turned round and there was

Clarissa again. She had come back to fetch him. He was overcome by her generosity—her goodness.

"Come along," she said. "They're waiting."

He had never felt so happy in the whole of his life! Without a word they made it up. They walked down to the lake. He had twenty minutes of perfect happiness. Her voice, her laugh, her dress (something floating, white, crimson), her spirit, her adventurousness; she made them all disembark and explore the island; she startled a hen; she laughed; she sang. And all the time, he knew perfectly well, Dalloway was falling in love with her; she was falling in love with Dalloway; but it didn't seem to matter. Nothing mattered. They sat on the ground and talked—he and Clarissa. They went in and out of each other's minds without any effort. And then in a second it was over. He said to himself as they were getting into the boat, "She will marry that man," dully, without any resentment; but it was an obvious thing. Dalloway would marry Clarissa.

Dalloway rowed them in. He said nothing. But somehow as they watched him start, jumping on to his bicycle to ride twenty miles through the woods, wobbling off down the drive, waving his hand and disappearing, he obviously did feel, instinctively, tremendously, strongly, all that; the night; the romance; Clarissa. He deserved to have her.

For himself, he was absurd. His demands upon Clarissa (he could see it now) were absurd. He asked impossible things. He made terrible scenes. She would have accepted him still, perhaps, if he had been less absurd. Sally thought so. She wrote him all that summer long letters; how they had talked of him; how she had praised him, how Clarissa burst into tears! It was an extraordinary summer—all letters, scenes, telegrams—arriving at Bourton early in the morning, hanging about till the servants were up; appalling *tête-à-têtes* with old Mr. Parry at breakfast; Aunt Helena formidable but kind; Sally sweeping him off for talks in the vegetable garden; Clarissa in bed with headaches.

The final scene, the terrible scene which he believed had mattered more than anything in the whole of his life (it might be an exaggeration—but still so it did seem now) happened at three o'clock in the afternoon of a very hot day. It was a trifle that led up to it—Sally at lunch saying something about Dalloway, and calling him "My name is Dalloway"; whereupon Clarissa suddenly stiffened, coloured, in a way she had, and rapped out sharply, "We've had enough of that feeble joke." That was all; but for him it was precisely as if she had said, "I'm only amusing myself with you; I've an understanding with Richard Dalloway." So he took it. He had not slept for nights. "It's got to be finished one way or the other," he said to himself. He sent a note to her by Sally asking her to meet him by the fountain at three. "Something very important has happened," he scribbled at the end of it.

The fountain was in the middle of a little shrubbery, far from the house, with shrubs and trees all round it. There she came, even before the time, and they stood with the fountain between them, the spout (it was broken) dribbling water incessantly. How sights fix themselves upon the mind! For example, the vivid green moss.

She did not move. "Tell me the truth, tell me the truth," he kept on saying. He felt as if his forehead would burst. She seemed contracted, petrified. She did not move. "Tell me the truth," he repeated, when suddenly that old man Breitkopf popped his head in carrying the *Times*, stared at them; gaped; and went away. They neither of them moved. "Tell me the truth," he repeated. He felt that he was grinding against something physically hard; she was unyielding. She was like iron, like flint, rigid up the backbone. And when she said, "It's no use. It's no use. This is the end"—after he had spoken for hours, it seemed, with the tears running down his cheeks—it was as if she had hit him in the face. She turned, she left him, went away.

"Clarissa!" he cried. "Clarissa!" But she never came back. It was over. He went away that night. He never saw her again.

It was awful, he cried, awful, awful!

Still, the sun was hot. Still, one got over things. Still, life had a way of adding day to day. Still, he thought, yawning and beginning to take notice—Regent's Park had changed very little since he was a boy, except for the squirrels—still, presumably there were compensations—when little Elise Mitchell, who had been picking up pebbles to add to the pebble collection which she and her brother were making on the nursery mantelpiece, plumped her handful down on the nurse's knee and scudded off again full tilt into a lady's legs. Peter Walsh laughed out.

But Lucrezia Warren Smith was saying to herself, It's wicked; why should I suffer? she was asking, as she walked down the broad path. No; I can't stand it any longer, she was saying, having left Septimus, who wasn't Septimus any longer, to say hard, cruel, wicked things, to talk to himself, to talk to a dead man, on the seat over there; when the child ran full tilt into her, fell flat, and burst out crying.

That was comforting rather. She stood her upright, dusted her frock, kissed her.

But for herself she had done nothing wrong; she had loved Septimus; she had been happy; she had had a beautiful home, and there her sisters lived still, making hats. Why should *she* suffer?

The child ran straight back to its nurse, and Rezia saw her scolded, comforted, taken up by the nurse who put down her knitting, and the kind-looking man gave her his watch to blow open⁸ to comfort her—but why should *she* be exposed? Why not left in Milan? Why tortured? Why?

Slightly waved by tears the broad path, the nurse, the man in grey, the perambulator, rose and fell before her eyes. To be rocked by this malignant torturer was her lot. But why? She was like a bird sheltering under the thin hollow of a leaf, who blinks at the sun when the leaf moves; starts at the crack of a dry twig. She was exposed; she was surrounded by the enormous trees, vast clouds of an indifferent world, exposed; tortured; and why should she suffer? Why?

She frowned; she stamped her foot. She must go back again to Septimus since it was almost time for them to be going to Sir William

Bradshaw. She must go back and tell him, go back to him sitting there on the green chair under the tree, talking to himself, or to that dead man Evans, whom she had only seen once for a moment in the shop. He had seemed a nice quiet man; a great friend of Septimus's, and he had been killed in the War. But such things happen to every one. Every one has friends who were killed in the War. Every one gives up something when they marry. She had given up her home. She had come to live here, in this awful city. But Septimus let himself think about horrible things, as she could too, if she tried. He had grown stranger and stranger. He said people were talking behind the bedroom walls. Mrs. Filmer thought it odd. He saw things too—he had seen an old woman's head in the middle of a fern. Yet he could be happy when he chose. They went to Hampton Court⁹ on top of a bus, and they were perfectly happy. All the little red and yellow flowers were out on the grass, like floating lamps he said, and talked and chattered and laughed, making up stories. Suddenly he said, "Now we will kill ourselves," when they were standing by the river, and he looked at it with a look which she had seen in his eyes when a train went by, or an omnibus—a look as if something fascinated him; and she felt he was going from her and she caught him by the arm. But going home he was perfectly quiet—perfectly reasonable. He would argue with her about killing themselves; and explain how wicked people were; how he could see them making up lies as they passed in the street. He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything. He knew the meaning of the world, he said. Then when they got back he could hardly walk. He lay on the sofa and made her hold his hand to prevent him from falling down, down, he cried, into the flames! and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls, and hands pointing round the screen. Yet they were quite alone. But he began to talk aloud, answering people, arguing, laughing, crying, getting very excited and making her write things down. Perfect nonsense it was; about death; about Miss Isabel Pole. She could stand it no longer. She would go back.

She was close to him now, could see him staring at the sky, muttering, clasping his hands. Yet Dr. Holmes said there was nothing the matter with him. What then had happened—why had he gone, then, why, when she sat by him, did he start, frown at her, move away, and point at her hand, take her hand, look at it terrified?

Was it that she had taken off her wedding ring? "My hand has grown so thin," she said. "I have put it in my purse," she told him.

He dropped her hand. Their marriage was over, he thought, with agony, with relief. The rope was cut; he mounted; he was free, as it was decreed that he, Septimus, the lord of men, should be free; alone (since his wife had thrown away her wedding ring; since she had left him), he, Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilisation—Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin,¹ and now himself—was to be given whole to. . . "To whom?" he asked aloud. "To the Prime Minister," the voices which rustled above his head replied. The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first that trees are alive; next there is no crime; next love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever.

No crime; love; he repeated, fumbling for his card and pencil, when a Skye terrier snuffed his trousers and he started in an agony of fear. It was turning into a man! He could not watch it happen! It was horrible, terrible to see a dog become a man! At once the dog trotted away.

Heaven was divinely merciful, infinitely benignant. It spared him, pardoned his weakness. But what was the scientific explanation (for one must be scientific above all things)? Why could he see through bodies, see into the future, when dogs will become men? It was the heat wave presumably, operating upon a brain made sensitive by eons of evolution. Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock.

He lay back in his chair, exhausted but upheld. He lay resting, waiting, before he again interpreted, with effort, with agony, to mankind. He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head. Music began clanging against the rocks up here. It is a motor horn down in the street, he muttered; but up here it cannoned from rock to rock, divided, met in shocks of sound which rose in smooth columns (that music should be visible was a discovery) and became an anthem, an anthem twined round now by a shepherd boy's piping (That's an old man playing a penny whistle by the public-house, he muttered) which, as the boy stood still came bubbling from his pipe, and then, as he climbed higher, made its exquisite plaint while the traffic passed beneath. This boy's elegy is played among the traffic, thought Septimus. Now he withdraws up into the snows, and roses hang about him—the thick red roses which grow on my bedroom wall, he reminded himself. The music stopped. He has his penny, he reasoned it out, and has gone on to the next public-house.

But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, but let me rest still; he begged (he was talking to himself again—it was awful, awful!); and as, before waking, the voices of birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun growing hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous about to happen.

He had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked at the houses, at the railings, at the antelopes stretching over the palings, beauty sprang instantly. To

watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper; and now and again some chime (it might be a motor horn) tinkling divinely on the grass stalks—all of this, calm and reasonable as it was, made out of ordinary things as it was, was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now. Beauty was everywhere.

“It is time,” said Rezia.

The word “time” split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time. He sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly,² Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself—

“For God’s sake don’t come!” Septimus cried out. For he could not look upon the dead.

But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking towards them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; he was not changed. I must tell the whole world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in the grey suit came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees light on the desert’s edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure (and Septimus half rose from his chair), and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole—

“But I am so unhappy, Septimus,” said Rezia trying to make him sit down.

The millions lamented; for ages they had sorrowed. He would turn round, he would tell them in a few moments, only a few

moments more, of this relief, of this joy, of this astonishing revelation—

“The time, Septimus,” Rezia repeated. “What is the time?”

He was talking, he was starting, this man must notice him. He was looking at them.

“I will tell you the time,” said Septimus, very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously. As he sat smiling at the dead man in the grey suit the quarter struck—the quarter to twelve.

And that is being young, Peter Walsh thought as he passed them. To be having an awful scene—the poor girl looked absolutely desperate—in the middle of the morning. But what was it about, he wondered, what had the young man in the overcoat been saying to her to make her look like that; what awful fix had they got themselves into, both to look so desperate as that on a fine summer morning? The amusing thing about coming back to England, after five years, was the way it made, anyhow the first days, things stand out as if one had never seen them before; lovers squabbling under a tree; the domestic family life of the parks. Never had he seen London look so enchanting—the softness of the distances; the richness; the greenness; the civilisation, after India, he thought, strolling across the grass.

This susceptibility to impressions had been his undoing no doubt. Still at his age he had, like a boy or a girl even, these alternations of mood; good days, bad days, for no reason whatever, happiness from a pretty face, downright misery at the sight of a frump. After India of course one fell in love with every woman one met. There was a freshness about them; even the poorest dressed better than five years ago surely; and to his eye the fashions had never been so becoming; the long black cloaks; the slimness; the elegance; and then the delicious and apparently universal habit of paint. Every woman, even the most respectable, had roses blooming under glass; lips cut with a knife; curls of Indian ink; there was design, art, everywhere; a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place. What did the young people think about? Peter Walsh asked himself.

Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. Now for instance there was a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water-closets. That you couldn't have done ten years ago—written quite openly about water-closets³ in a respectable weekly. And then this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff and making up in public. On board ship coming home there were lots of young men and girls—Betty and Bertie he remembered in particular—carrying on quite openly; the old mother sitting and watching them with her knitting, cool as a cucumber. The girl would stand still and powder her nose in front of every one. And they weren't engaged; just having a good time; no feelings hurt on either side. As hard as nails she was—Betty What'shername—; but a thorough good sort. She would make a very good wife at thirty—she would marry when it suited her to marry; marry some rich man and live in a large house near Manchester.⁴

Who was it now who had done that? Peter Walsh asked himself, turning into the Broad Walk,—married a rich man and lived in a large house near Manchester? Somebody who had written him a long, gushing letter quite lately about “blue hydrangeas.” It was seeing blue hydrangeas that made her think of him and the old days—Sally Seton, of course! It was Sally Seton—the last person in the world one would have expected to marry a rich man and live in a large house near Manchester, the wild, the daring, the romantic Sally!

But of all that ancient lot, Clarissa's friends—Whitbreads, Kinderleys, Cunninghams, Kinloch-Jones's—Sally was probably the best. She tried to get hold of things by the right end anyhow. She saw through Hugh Whitbread anyhow—the admirable Hugh—when Clarissa and the rest were at his feet.

“The Whitbreads?” he could hear her saying. “Who are the Whitbreads? Coal merchants. Respectable tradespeople.”

Hugh she detested for some reason. He thought of nothing but his own appearance, she said. He ought to have been a Duke. He would be certain to marry one of the Royal Princesses. And of course Hugh had the most extraordinary, the most natural, the most

sublime respect for the British aristocracy of any human being he had ever come across. Even Clarissa had to own that. Oh, but he was such a dear, so unselfish, gave up shooting to please his old mother—remembered his aunts' birthdays, and so on.

Sally, to do her justice, saw through all that. One of the things he remembered best was an argument one Sunday morning at Bourton about women's rights⁵ (that antediluvian topic), when Sally suddenly lost her temper, flared up, and told Hugh that he represented all that was most detestable in British middle-class life. She told him that she considered him responsible for the state of "those poor girls in Piccadilly"⁶—Hugh, the perfect gentleman, poor Hugh!—never did a man look more horrified! She did it on purpose she said afterwards (for they used to get together in the vegetable garden and compare notes). "He's read nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing," he could hear her saying in that very emphatic voice which carried so much farther than she knew. The stable-boys had more life in them than Hugh, she said. He was a perfect specimen of the public school⁷ type, she said. No country but England could have produced him. She was really spiteful, for some reason; had some grudge against him. Something had happened—he forgot what—in the smoking-room. He had insulted her—kissed her? Incredible! Nobody believed a word against Hugh of course. Who could? Kissing Sally in the smoking-room! If it had been some Honourable Edith or Lady Violet, perhaps; but not that ragamuffin Sally without a penny to her name, and a father or a mother gambling at Monte Carlo.⁸ For of all the people he had ever met Hugh was the greatest snob—the most obsequious—no, he didn't cringe exactly. He was too much of a prig for that. A first-rate valet was the obvious comparison—somebody who walked behind carrying suit cases; could be trusted to send telegrams—indispensable to hostesses. And he'd found his job—married his Honourable Evelyn; got some little post at Court, looked after the King's cellars, polished the Imperial shoe-buckles, went about in knee-breeches and lace ruffles. How remorseless life is! A little job at Court!

He had married this lady, the Honourable Evelyn, and they lived hereabouts, so he thought (looking at the pompous houses overlooking the Park), for he had lunched there once in a house which had, like all Hugh's possessions, something that no other house could possibly have—linen cupboards it might have been. You had to go and look at them—you had to spend a great deal of time always admiring whatever it was—linen cupboards, pillow-cases, old oak furniture, pictures, which Hugh had picked up for an old song. But Mrs. Hugh sometimes gave the show away. She was one of those obscure mouse-like little women who admire big men. She was almost negligible. Then suddenly she would say something quite unexpected—something sharp. She had the relics of the grand manner perhaps. The steam coal was a little too strong for her—it made the atmosphere thick. And so there they lived, with their linen cupboards and their old masters and their pillow-cases fringed with real lace at the rate of five or ten thousand a year presumably, while he, who was two years older than Hugh, cadged for a job.⁹

At fifty-three he had to come and ask them to put him into some secretary's office, to find him some usher's job teaching little boys Latin, at the beck and call of some mandarin¹ in an office, something that brought in five hundred a year; for if he married Daisy, even with his pension, they could never do on less. Whitbread could do it presumably; or Dalloway. He didn't mind what he asked Dalloway. He was a thorough good sort; a bit limited; a bit thick in the head; yes; but a thorough good sort. Whatever he took up he did in the same matter-of-fact sensible way; without a touch of imagination, without a spark of brilliancy, but with the inexplicable niceness of his type. He ought to have been a country gentleman—he was wasted on politics. He was at his best out of doors, with horses and dogs—how good he was, for instance, when that great shaggy dog of Clarissa's got caught in a trap and had its paw half torn off, and Clarissa turned faint and Dalloway did the whole thing; bandaged, made splints; told Clarissa not to be a fool. That was what she liked him for perhaps—that was what she needed. "Now, my dear, don't

be a fool. Hold this—fetch that,” all the time talking to the dog as if it were a human being.

But how could she swallow all that stuff about poetry? How could she let him hold forth about Shakespeare? Seriously and solemnly Richard Dalloway got on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare’s sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes (besides the relationship was not one that he approved). No decent man ought to let his wife visit a deceased wife’s sister. Incredible! The only thing to do was to pelt him with sugared almonds—it was at dinner. But Clarissa sucked it all in; thought it so honest of him; so independent of him; Heaven knows if she didn’t think him the most original mind she’d ever met!

That was one of the bonds between Sally, and himself. There was a garden where they used to walk, a walled-in place, with rose-bushes and giant cauliflowers—he could remember Sally tearing off a rose, stopping to exclaim at the beauty of the cabbage leaves in the moonlight (it was extraordinary how vividly it all came back to him, things he hadn’t thought of for years), while she implored him, half laughing of course, to carry off Clarissa, to save her from the Hughs and the Dalloways and all the other “perfect gentlemen” who would “stifle her soul” (she wrote reams of poetry in those days), make a mere hostess of her, encourage her worldliness. But one must do Clarissa justice. She wasn’t going to marry Hugh anyhow. She had a perfectly clear notion of what she wanted. Her emotions were all on the surface. Beneath, she was very shrewd—a far better judge of character than Sally, for instance, and with it all, purely feminine; with that extraordinary gift, that woman’s gift, of making a world of her own wherever she happened to be. She came into a room; she stood, as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however; there she was.

No, no, no! He was not in love with her any more! He only felt, after seeing her that morning, among her scissors and silks, making

ready for the party, unable to get away from the thought of her; she kept coming back and back like a sleeper jolting against him in a railway carriage; which was not being in love, of course; it was thinking of her, criticising her, starting again, after thirty years, trying to explain her. The obvious thing to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world—which was true in a sense; she had admitted it to him. (You could always get her to own up if you took the trouble; she was honest.) What she would say was that she hated frumps, fogies, failures, like himself presumably; thought people had no right to slouch about with their hands in their pockets; must do something, be something; and these great swells, these Duchesses, these hoary old Countesses one met in her drawing-room, unspeakably remote as he felt them to be from anything that mattered a straw, stood for something real to her. Lady Bexborough, she said once, held herself upright (so did Clarissa herself; she never lounged in any sense of the word; she was straight as a dart, a little rigid in fact). She said they had a kind of courage which the older she grew the more she respected. In all this there was a great deal of Dalloway, of course; a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit,² which had grown on her, as it tends to do. With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes—one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard—as if one couldn't know to a tittle what Richard thought by reading the *Morning Post*³ of a morning! These parties for example were all for him, or for her idea of him (to do Richard justice he would have been happier farming in Norfolk). She made her drawing-room a sort of meeting-place; she had a genius for it. Over and over again he had seen her take some raw youth, twist him, turn him, wake him up; set him going. Infinite numbers of dull people conglomerated round her of course. But odd unexpected people turned up; an artist sometimes; sometimes a writer; queer fish in that atmosphere. And behind it all was that network of visiting, leaving cards, being kind to people; running about with bunches of flowers, little presents; So-and-so was going to France—

must have an air-cushion; a real drain on her strength; all that interminable traffic that women of her sort keep up; but she did it genuinely, from a natural instinct.

Oddly enough, she was one of the most thorough-going sceptics he had ever met, and possibly (this was a theory he used to make up to account for her, so transparent in some ways, so inscrutable in others), possibly she said to herself, As we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship (her favourite reading as a girl was Huxley and Tyndall,⁴ and they were fond of these nautical metaphors), as the whole thing is a bad joke, let us, at any rate, do our part; mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners (Huxley again); decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions; be as decent as we possibly can. Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way,—her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives were seriously put out if, all the same, you behaved like a lady. That phase came directly after Sylvia's death—that horrible affair. To see your own sister killed by a falling tree (all Justin Parry's fault—all his carelessness) before your very eyes, a girl too on the verge of life, the most gifted of them, Clarissa always said, was enough to turn one bitter. Later she wasn't so positive perhaps; she thought there were no Gods; no one was to blame; and so she evolved this atheist's religion of doing good for the sake of goodness.

And of course she enjoyed life immensely. It was her nature to enjoy (though goodness only knows, she had her reserves; it was a mere sketch, he often felt, that even he, after all these years, could make of Clarissa). Anyhow there was no bitterness in her; none of that sense of moral virtue which is so repulsive in good women. She enjoyed practically everything. If you walked with her in Hyde Park now it was a bed of tulips, now a child in a perambulator, now some absurd little drama she made up on the spur of the moment. (Very likely, she would have talked to those lovers, if she had thought them unhappy.) She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite, but she needed people, always people, to bring it out, with the inevitable result that she frittered her time away, lunching,

dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination. There she would sit at the head of the table taking infinite pains with some old buffer who might be useful to Dalloway—they knew the most appalling bores in Europe—or in came Elizabeth and everything must give way to *her*. She was at a High School,⁵ at the inarticulate stage last time he was over, a round-eyed, pale-faced girl, with nothing of her mother in her, a silent stolid creature, who took it all as a matter of course, let her mother make a fuss of her, and then said "May I go now?" like a child of four; going off, Clarissa explained, with that mixture of amusement and pride which Dalloway himself seemed to rouse in her, to play hockey. And now Elizabeth was "out,"⁶ presumably; thought him an old fogey, laughed at her mother's friends. Ah well, so be it. The compensation of growing old, Peter Walsh thought, coming out of Regent's Park, and holding his hat in hand, was simply this; that the passions remain as strong as ever, but one has gained—at last!—the power which adds the supreme flavour to existence,—the power of taking hold of experience, of turning it round, slowly, in the light.

A terrible confession it was (he put his hat on again), but now, at the age of fifty-three one scarcely needed people any more. Life itself, every moment of it, every drop of it, here, this instant, now, in the sun, in Regent's Park, was enough. Too much indeed. A whole lifetime was too short to bring out, now that one had acquired the power, the full flavour; to extract every ounce of pleasure, every shade of meaning; which both were so much more solid than they used to be, so much less personal. It was impossible that he should ever suffer again as Clarissa had made him suffer. For hours at a time (pray God that one might say these things without being overheard!), for hours and days he never thought of Daisy.

Could it be that he was in love with her then, remembering the misery, the torture, the extraordinary passion of those days? It was a different thing altogether—a much pleasanter thing—the truth being, of course, that now *she* was in love with *him*. And that

perhaps was the reason why, when the ship actually sailed, he felt an extraordinary relief, wanted nothing so much as to be alone; was annoyed to find all her little attentions—cigars, notes, a rug for the voyage—in his cabin. Every one if they were honest would say the same; one doesn't want people after fifty; one doesn't want to go on telling women they are pretty; that's what most men of fifty would say, Peter Walsh thought, if they were honest.

But then these astonishing accesses of emotion—bursting into tears this morning, what was all that about? What could Clarissa have thought of him? thought him a fool presumably, not for the first time. It was jealousy that was at the bottom of it—jealousy which survives every other passion of mankind, Peter Walsh thought, holding his pocket-knife at arm's length. She had been meeting Major Orde, Daisy said in her last letter; said it on purpose he knew; said it to make him jealous; he could see her wrinkling her forehead as she wrote, wondering what she could say to hurt him; and yet it made no difference; he was furious! All this pother of coming to England and seeing lawyers wasn't to marry her, but to prevent her from marrying anybody else. That was what tortured him, that was what came over him when he saw Clarissa so calm, so cold, so intent on her dress or whatever it was; realising what she might have spared him, what she had reduced him to—a whimpering, snivelling old ass. But women, he thought, shutting his pocketknife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men. Clarissa was as cold as an icicle. There she would sit on the sofa by his side, let him take her hand, give him one kiss—Here he was at the crossing.

A sound interrupted him; a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning into

ee um fah um so
foo swee too eem oo—

the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth; which issued, just opposite Regent's Park Tube

station from a tall quivering shape, like a funnel, like a rusty pump,
like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves which lets the wind
run up and down its branches singing

ee um fah um so
foo swee too eem oo

and rocks and creaks and moans in the eternal breeze.

Through all ages—when the pavement was grass, when it was
swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of
silent sunrise, the battered woman—for she wore a skirt—with her
right hand exposed, her left clutching at her side, stood singing of
love—love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which
prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead
these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in
the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she
remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's
enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills, and when at last
she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now
become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her
side a bunch of purple heather, there on her high burial place which
the last rays of the last sun caressed; for then the pageant of the
universe would be over.

As the ancient song bubbled up opposite Regent's Park Tube
station still the earth seemed green and flowery; still, though it
issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too,
matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still the old bubbling
bubbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages,
and skeletons and treasure, streamed away in rivulets over the
pavement and all along the Marylebone Road, and down towards
Euston,² fertilising, leaving a damp stain.

Still remembering how once in some primeval May she had
walked with her lover, this rusty pump, this battered old woman with
one hand exposed for coppers the other clutching her side, would
still be there in ten million years, remembering how once she had

walked in May, where the sea flows now, with whom it did not matter—he was a man, oh yes, a man who had loved her. But the passage of ages had blurred the clarity of that ancient May day, the bright petalled flowers were hoar and silver frosted; and she no longer saw, when she implored him (as she did now quite clearly) “look in my eyes with thy sweet eyes intently,” she no longer saw brown eyes, black whiskers or sunburnt face but only a looming shape, a shadow shape, to which, with the bird-like freshness of the very aged she still twittered “give me your hand and let me press it gently” (Peter Walsh couldn’t help giving the poor creature a coin as he stepped into his taxi), “and if some one should see, what matter they?” she demanded; and her fist clutched at her side, and she smiled, pocketing her shilling, and all peering inquisitive eyes seemed blotted out, and the passing generations—the pavement was crowded with bustling middleclass people—vanished, like leaves, to be trodden under, to be soaked and steeped and made mould of by that eternal spring—

ee um fah um so
foo swee too eem oo

“Poor old woman,” said Rezia Warren Smith, waiting to cross.

Oh poor old wretch!

Suppose it was a wet night? Suppose one’s father, or somebody who had known one in better days had happened to pass, and saw one standing there in the gutter? And where did she sleep at night?

Cheerfully, almost gaily, the invincible thread of sound wound up into the air like the smoke from a cottage chimney, winding up clean beech trees and issuing in a tuft of blue smoke among the topmost leaves. “And if some one should see, what matter they?”

Since she was so unhappy, for weeks and weeks now, Rezia had given meanings to things that happened, almost felt sometimes that she must stop people in the street, if they looked good, kind people, just to say to them “I am unhappy”; and this old woman singing in the street “if some one should see, what matter they?” made her suddenly quite sure that everything was going to be right. They

were going to Sir William Bradshaw; she thought his name sounded nice; he would cure Septimus at once. And then there was a brewer's cart, and the grey horses had upright bristles of straw in their tails; there were newspaper placards. It was a silly, silly dream, being unhappy.

So they crossed, Mr. and Mrs. Septimus Warren Smith, and was there, after all, anything to draw attention to them, anything to make a passer-by suspect here is a young man who carries in him the greatest message in the world, and is, moreover, the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable? Perhaps they walked more slowly than other people, and there was something hesitating, trailing, in the man's walk, but what more natural for a clerk, who has not been in the West End⁸ on a weekday at this hour for years, than to keep looking at the sky, looking at this, that and the other, as if Portland Place were a room he had come into when the family are away, the chandeliers being hung in holland bags,⁹ and the caretaker, as she lets in long shafts of dusty light upon deserted, queer-looking armchairs, lifting one corner of the long blinds, explains to the visitors what a wonderful place it is; how wonderful, but at the same time, he thinks, as he looks at chairs and tables, how strange.

To look at, he might have been a clerk, but of the better sort; for he wore brown boots; his hands were educated; so, too, his profile—his angular, big-nosed, intelligent, sensitive profile; but not his lips altogether, for they were loose; and his eyes (as eyes tend to be), eyes merely; hazel, large; so that he was, on the whole, a border case, neither one thing nor the other, might end with a house at Purley¹ and a motor car, or continue renting apartments in back streets all his life; one of those half-educated, self-educated men whose education is all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries, read in the evening after the day's work, on the advice of well-known authors consulted by letter.

As for the other experiences, the solitary ones, which people go through alone, in their bedrooms, in their offices, walking the fields and the streets of London, he had them; had left home, a mere boy,

because of his mother; she lied; because he came down to tea for the fiftieth time with his hands unwashed; because he could see no future for a poet in Stroud;² and so, making a confidant of his little sister, had gone to London leaving an absurd note behind him, such as great men have written, and the world has read later when the story of their struggles has become famous.

London has swallowed up many millions of young men called Smith; thought nothing of fantastic Christian names like Septimus with which their parents have thought to distinguish them. Lodging off the Euston Road,³ there were experiences, again experiences, such as change a face in two years from a pink innocent oval to a face lean, contracted, hostile. But of all this what could the most observant of friends have said except what a gardener says when he opens the conservatory door in the morning and finds a new blossom on his plant:—It has flowered; flowered from vanity, ambition, idealism, passion, loneliness, courage, laziness, the usual seeds, which all muddled up (in a room off the Euston Road), made him shy, and stammering, made him anxious to improve himself, made him fall in love with Miss Isabel Pole, lecturing in the Waterloo Road⁴ upon Shakespeare.

Was he not like Keats?⁵ she asked; and reflected how she might give him a taste of *Antony and Cleopatra*⁶ and the rest; lent him books; wrote him scraps of letters; and lit in him such a fire as burns only once in a lifetime, without heat, flickering a red gold flame infinitely ethereal and insubstantial over Miss Pole; *Antony and Cleopatra*; and the Waterloo Road. He thought her beautiful, believed her impeccably wise; dreamed of her, wrote poems to her, which, ignoring the subject, she corrected in red ink; he saw her, one summer evening, walking in a green dress in a square. "It has flowered," the gardener might have said, had he opened the door; had he come in, that is to say, any night about this time, and found him writing; found him tearing up his writing; found him finishing a masterpiece at three o'clock in the morning and running out to pace the streets, and visiting churches, and fasting one day, drinking

another, devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilisation*, and Bernard Shaw.⁷

Something was up, Mr. Brewer knew; Mr. Brewer, managing clerk at Sibleys and Arrowsmiths,⁸ auctioneers, valuers, land and estate agents; something was up, he thought, and, being paternal with his young men, and thinking very highly of Smith's abilities, and prophesying that he would, in ten or fifteen years, succeed to the leather arm-chair in the inner room under the skylight with the deed-boxes round him, "if he keeps his health," said Mr. Brewer, and that was the danger—he looked weakly; advised football, invited him to supper and was seeing his way to consider recommending a rise of salary, when something happened which threw out many of Mr. Brewer's calculations, took away his ablest young fellows, and eventually, so prying and insidious were the fingers of the European War, smashed a plaster cast of Ceres,⁹ ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's nerves at Mr. Brewer's establishment at Muswell Hill.¹

Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. There in the trenches the change which Mr. Brewer desired when he advised football was produced instantly; he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name. It was a case of two dogs playing on a hearth-rug; one worrying a paper screw, snarling, snapping, giving a pinch, now and then, at the old dog's ear; the other lying somnolent, blinking at the fire, raising a paw, turning and growling good-temperedly. They had to be together, share with each other, fight with each other, quarrel with each other. But when Evans (Rezia who had only seen him once called him "a quiet man," a sturdy red-haired man, undemonstrative in the company of women), when Evans was killed, just before the Armistice,² in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone

through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. When peace came he was in Milan, billeted in the house of an innkeeper with a courtyard, flowers in tubs, little tables in the open, daughters making hats, and to Lucrezia, the younger daughter, he became engaged one evening when the panic was on him—that he could not feel.

For now that it was all over, truce signed, and the dead buried, he had, especially in the evening, these sudden thunderclaps of fear. He could not feel. As he opened the door of the room where the Italian girls sat making hats, he could see them; could hear them; they were rubbing wires among coloured beads in saucers; they were turning buckram³ shapes this way and that; the table was all strewn with feathers, spangles, silks, ribbons; scissors were rapping on the table; but something failed him; he could not feel. Still, scissors rapping, girls laughing, hats being made protected him; he was assured of safety; he had a refuge. But he could not sit there all night. There were moments of waking in the early morning. The bed was falling; he was falling. Oh for the scissors and the lamplight and the buckram shapes! He asked Lucrezia to marry him, the younger of the two, the gay, the frivolous, with those little artist's fingers that she would hold up and say "It is all in them." Silk, feathers, what not were alive to them.

"It is the hat that matters most," she would say, when they walked out together. Every hat that passed, she would examine; and the cloak and the dress and the way the woman held herself. Ill-dressing, over-dressing she stigmatised, not savagely, rather with impatient movements of the hands, like those of a painter who puts from him some obvious well-meant glaring imposture; and then, generously, but always critically, she would welcome a shopgirl who had turned her little bit of stuff gallantly, or praise, wholly, with enthusiastic and professional understanding, a French lady descending from her carriage, in chinchilla,⁴ robes, pearls.

"Beautiful!" she would murmur, nudging Septimus, that he might see. But beauty was behind a pane of glass. Even taste (Rezia liked ices, chocolates, sweet things) had no relish to him. He put down his cup on the little marble table. He looked at people outside; happy they seemed, collecting in the middle of the street, shouting, laughing, squabbling over nothing. But he could not taste, he could not feel. In the teashop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him—he could not feel. He could reason; he could read, Dante for example, quite easily ("Septimus, do put down your book," said Rezia, gently shutting the *Inferno*⁵), he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then—that he could not feel.

"The English are so silent," Rezia said. She liked it, she said. She respected these Englishmen, and wanted to see London, and the English horses, and the tailor-made suits, and could remember hearing how wonderful the shops were, from an Aunt who had married and lived in Soho.⁶

It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven;⁷ it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning.

At the office they advanced him to a post of considerable responsibility. They were proud of him; he had won crosses. "You have done your duty; it is up to us—" began Mr. Brewer; and could not finish, so pleasurable was his emotion. They took admirable lodgings off the Tottenham Court Road.⁸

Here he opened Shakespeare once more. That boy's business of the intoxication of language—*Antony and Cleopatra*—had shrivelled utterly. How Shakespeare loathed humanity—the putting on of clothes, the getting of children, the sordidity of the mouth and the belly! This was now revealed to Septimus; the message hidden in the beauty of words. The secret signal which one generation passes, under disguise, to the next is loathing, hatred, despair. Dante the same. Aeschylus⁹ (translated) the same. There Rezia sat at the table trimming hats. She trimmed hats for Mrs. Filmer's friends; she

trimmed hats by the hour. She looked pale, mysterious, like a lily, drowned, under water, he thought.

"The English are so serious," she would say, putting her arms round Septimus, her cheek against his.

Love between man and woman was repulsive to Shakespeare. The business of copulation was filth to him before the end. But, Rezia said, she must have children. They had been married five years.

They went to the Tower together; to the Victoria and Albert Museum; stood in the crowd to see the King open Parliament.¹ And there were the shops—hat shops, dress shops, shops with leather bags in the window, where she would stand staring. But she must have a boy.

She must have a son like Septimus, she said. But nobody could be like Septimus; so gentle; so serious; so clever. Could she not read Shakespeare too? Was Shakespeare a difficult author? she asked.

One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that.

He watched her snip, shape, as one watches a bird hop, flit in the grass, without daring to move a finger. For the truth is (let her ignore it) that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces. There was Brewer at the office, with his waxed moustache, coral tie-pin, white slip, and pleasurable emotions—all coldness and clamminess within,—his geraniums ruined in the War—his cook's nerves destroyed; or Amelia What'shername, handing round cups of tea punctually at five—a leering, sneering obscene little harpy; and the Toms and Berties² in their starched shirt fronts oozing thick drops of vice. They never saw him drawing pictures of them naked at their antics in his notebook. In the street, vans roared past him; brutality blared out on placards;

men were trapped in mines; women burnt alive; and once a maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud), ambled and nodded and grinned past him, in the Tottenham Court Road, each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his hopeless woe. And would *he* go mad?

At tea Rezia told him that Mrs. Filmer's daughter was expecting a baby. *She* could not grow old and have no children! She was very lonely, she was very unhappy! She cried for the first time since they were married. Far away he heard her sobbing; he heard it accurately, he noticed it distinctly; he compared it to a piston thumping. But he felt nothing.

His wife was crying, and he felt nothing; only each time she sobbed in this profound, this silent, this hopeless way, he descended another step into the pit.

At last, with a melodramatic gesture which he assumed mechanically and with complete consciousness of its insincerity, he dropped his head on his hands. Now he had surrendered; now other people must help him. People must be sent for. He gave in.

Nothing could rouse him. Rezia put him to bed. She sent for a doctor—Mrs. Filmer's Dr. Holmes. Dr. Holmes examined him. There was nothing whatever the matter, said Dr. Holmes. Oh, what a relief! What a kind man, what a good man! thought Rezia. When he felt like that he went to the Music Hall, said Dr. Holmes. He took a day off with his wife and played golf. Why not try two tabloids of bromide³ dissolved in a glass of water at bedtime? These old Bloomsbury houses, said Dr. Holmes, tapping the wall, are often full of very fine panelling, which the landlords have the folly to paper over. Only the other day, visiting a patient, Sir Somebody Something in Bedford Square⁴—

So there was no excuse; nothing whatever the matter, except the sin for which human nature had condemned him to death; that he did not feel. He had not cared when Evans was killed; that was worst; but all the other crimes raised their heads and shook their fingers and jeered and sneered over the rail of the bed in the early hours of the morning at the prostrate body which lay realising its

degradation; how he had married his wife without loving her; had lied to her; seduced her; outraged Miss Isabel Pole, and was so pocked and marked with vice that women shuddered when they saw him in the street. The verdict of human nature on such a wretch was death.

Dr. Holmes came again. Large, fresh coloured, handsome, flicking his boots, looking in the glass, he brushed it all aside—headaches, sleeplessness, fears, dreams—nerve symptoms and nothing more, he said. If Dr. Holmes found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, he asked his wife for another plate of porridge at breakfast. (Rezia would learn to cook porridge.) But, he continued, health is largely a matter in our own control. Throw yourself into outside interests; take up some hobby. He opened Shakespeare—*Antony and Cleopatra*; pushed Shakespeare aside. Some hobby, said Dr. Holmes, for did he not owe his own excellent health (and he worked as hard as any man in London) to the fact that he could always switch off from his patients on to old furniture? And what a very pretty comb, if he might say so, Mrs. Warren Smith was wearing!

When the damned fool came again, Septimus refused to see him. Did he indeed? said Dr. Holmes, smiling agreeably. Really he had to give that charming little lady, Mrs. Smith, a friendly push before he could get past her into her husband's bedroom.

"So you're in a funk," he said agreeably, sitting down by his patient's side. He had actually talked of killing himself to his wife, quite a girl, a foreigner, wasn't she? Didn't that give her a very odd idea of English husbands? Didn't one owe perhaps a duty to one's wife? Wouldn't it be better to do something instead of lying in bed? For he had had forty years' experience behind him; and Septimus could take Dr. Holmes's word for it—there was nothing whatever the matter with him. And next time Dr. Holmes came he hoped to find Smith out of bed and not making that charming little lady his wife anxious about him.

Human nature, in short, was on him—the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him. Dr. Holmes came quite

regularly every day. Once you stumble, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard, human nature is on you. Holmes is on you. Their only chance was to escape, without letting Holmes know; to Italy—anywhere, anywhere, away from Dr. Holmes.

But Rezia could not understand him. Dr. Holmes was such a kind man. He was so interested in Septimus. He only wanted to help them, he said. He had four little children and he had asked her to tea, she told Septimus.

So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it, with a table knife, uglily, with floods of blood,—by sucking a gaspipe? He was too weak; he could scarcely raise his hand. Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won. But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world.

It was at that moment (Rezia gone shopping) that the great revelation took place. A voice spoke from behind the screen. Evans was speaking. The dead were with him.

“Evans, Evans!” he cried.

Mr. Smith was talking aloud to himself, Agnes the servant girl cried to Mrs. Filmer in the kitchen. “Evans, Evans,” he had said as she brought in the tray. She jumped, she did. She scuttled downstairs.

And Rezia came in, with her flowers, and walked across the room, and put the roses in a vase, upon which the sun struck directly, and it went laughing, leaping round the room.

She had had to buy the roses, Rezia said, from a poor man in the street. But they were almost dead already, she said, arranging the roses.

So there was a man outside; Evans presumably; and the roses, which Rezia said were half dead, had been picked by him in the fields of Greece. "Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—" he muttered.

"What are you saying, Septimus?" Rezia asked, wild with terror, for he was talking to himself.

She sent Agnes running for Dr. Holmes. Her husband, she said, was mad. He scarcely knew her.

"You brute! You brute!" cried Septimus, seeing human nature, that is Dr. Holmes, enter the room.

"Now what's all this about?" said Dr. Holmes in the most amiable way in the world. "Talking nonsense to frighten your wife?" But he would give him something to make him sleep. And if they were rich people, said Dr. Holmes, looking ironically round the room, by all means let them go to Harley Street;⁵ if they had no confidence in him, said Dr. Holmes, looking not quite so kind.

It was precisely twelve o'clock; twelve by Big Ben; whose stroke was wafted over the northern part of London; blent with that of other clocks, mixed in a thin ethereal way with the clouds and wisps of smoke, and died up there among the seagulls—twelve o'clock struck as Clarissa Dalloway laid her green dress on her bed, and the Warren Smiths walked down Harley Street. Twelve was the hour of their appointment. Probably, Rezia thought, that was Sir William Bradshaw's house with the grey motor car in front of it. The leaden circles dissolved in the air.

Indeed it was—Sir William Bradshaw's motor car; low, powerful, grey with plain initials interlocked on the panel, as if the pomps of heraldry were incongruous, this man being the ghostly helper, the priest of science; and, as the motor car was grey, so to match its sober suavity, grey furs, silver grey rugs were heaped in it, to keep her ladyship warm while she waited. For often Sir William would travel sixty miles or more down into the country to visit the rich, the afflicted, who could afford the very large fee which Sir William very properly charged for his advice. Her ladyship waited with the rugs about her knees an hour or more, leaning back, thinking sometimes

of the patient, sometimes, excusably, of the wall of gold, mounting minute by minute while she waited; the wall of gold that was mounting between them and all shifts and anxieties (she had borne them bravely; they had had their struggles) until she felt wedged on a calm ocean, where only spice winds blow; respected, admired, envied, with scarcely anything left to wish for, though she regretted her stoutness; large dinner-parties every Thursday night to the profession; an occasional bazaar to be opened; Royalty greeted; too little time, alas, with her husband, whose work grew and grew; a boy doing well at Eton;⁶ she would have liked a daughter too; interests she had, however, in plenty; child welfare; the after-care of the epileptic, and photography, so that if there was a church building, or a church decaying, she bribed the sexton,⁷ got the key and took photographs, which were scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals, while she waited.

Sir William himself was no longer young. He had worked very hard; he had won his position by sheer ability (being the son of a shopkeeper); loved his profession; made a fine figurehead at ceremonies and spoke well—all of which had by the time he was knighted given him a heavy look, a weary look (the stream of patients being so incessant, the responsibilities and privileges of his profession so onerous), which weariness, together with his grey hairs, increased the extraordinary distinction of his presence and gave him the reputation (of the utmost importance in dealing with nerve cases) not merely of lightning skill, and almost infallible accuracy in diagnosis but of sympathy; tact; understanding of the human soul. He could see the first moment they came into the room (the Warren Smiths they were called); he was certain directly he saw the man; it was a case of extreme gravity. It was a case of complete breakdown—complete physical and nervous breakdown, with every symptom in an advanced stage, he ascertained in two or three minutes (writing answers to questions, murmured discreetly, on a pink card).

How long had Dr. Holmes been attending him?

Six weeks.

Prescribed a little bromide? Said there was nothing the matter? Ah yes (those general practitioners! thought Sir William. It took half his time to undo their blunders. Some were irreparable).

"You served with great distinction in the War?"

The patient repeated the word "war" interrogatively.

He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom, to be noted on the card.

"The War?" the patient asked. The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed.

"Yes, he served with the greatest distinction," Rezia assured the doctor; "he was promoted."

"And they have the very highest opinion of you at your office?" Sir William murmured, glancing at Mr. Brewer's very generously worded letter. "So that you have nothing to worry you, no financial anxiety, nothing?"

He had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature.

"I have—I have," he began, "committed a crime—"

"He has done nothing wrong whatever," Rezia assured the doctor. If Mr. Smith would wait, said Sir William, he would speak to Mrs. Smith in the next room. Her husband was very seriously ill, Sir William said. Did he threaten to kill himself?

Oh, he did, she cried. But he did not mean it, she said. Of course not. It was merely a question of rest,⁸ said Sir William; of rest, rest, rest; a long rest in bed. There was a delightful home down in the country where her husband would be perfectly looked after. Away from her? she asked. Unfortunately, yes; the people we care for most are not good for us when we are ill. But he was not mad, was he? Sir William said he never spoke of "madness"; he called it not having a sense of proportion. But her husband did not like doctors. He would refuse to go there. Shortly and kindly Sir William explained to her the state of the case. He had threatened to kill himself. There was no alternative. It was a question of law.⁹ He would lie in bed in

a beautiful house in the country. The nurses were admirable. Sir William would visit him once a week. If Mrs. Warren Smith was quite sure she had no more questions to ask—he never hurried his patients—they would return to her husband. She had nothing more to ask—not of Sir William.

So they returned to the most exalted of mankind; the criminal who faced his judges; the victim exposed on the heights; the fugitive; the drowned sailor; the poet of the immortal ode; the Lord who had gone from life to death; to Septimus Warren Smith, who sat in the arm-chair under the skylight staring at a photograph of Lady Bradshaw in Court dress, muttering messages about beauty.

"We have had our little talk," said Sir William.

"He says you are very, very ill," Rezia cried.

"We have been arranging that you should go into a home," said Sir William.

"One of Holmes's homes?" sneered Septimus.

The fellow made a distasteful impression. For there was in Sir William, whose father had been a tradesman, a natural respect for breeding and clothing, which shabbiness nettled; again, more profoundly, there was in Sir William, who had never had time for reading, a grudge, deeply buried, against cultivated people who came into his room and intimated that doctors, whose profession is a constant strain upon all the highest faculties, are not educated men.

"One of *my* homes, Mr. Warren Smith," he said, "where we will teach you to rest."

And there was just one thing more.

He was quite certain that when Mr. Warren Smith was well he was the last man in the world to frighten his wife. But he had talked of killing himself.

"We all have our moments of depression," said Sir William.

Once you fall, Septimus repeated to himself, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They

fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumbscrew¹ are applied. Human nature is remorseless.

"Impulses came upon him sometimes?" Sir William asked, with his pencil on a pink card.

That was his own affair, said Septimus.

"Nobody lives for himself alone," said Sir William, glancing at the photograph of his wife in Court dress.

"And you have a brilliant career before you," said Sir William. There was Mr. Brewer's letter on the table. "An exceptionally brilliant career."

But if he confessed? If he communicated? Would they let him off then, his torturers?

"I—I—" he stammered.

But what was his crime? He could not remember it.

"Yes?" Sir William encouraged him. (But it was growing late.)

Love, trees, there is no crime—what was his message?

He could not remember it.

"I—I—" Septimus stammered.

"Try to think as little about yourself as possible," said Sir William kindly. Really, he was not fit to be about.

Was there anything else they wished to ask him? Sir William would make all arrangements (he murmured to Rezia) and he would let her know between five and six that evening he murmured.

"Trust everything to me," he said, and dismissed them.

Never, never had Rezia felt such agony in her life! She had asked for help and been deserted! He had failed them! Sir William Bradshaw was not a nice man.

The upkeep of that motor car alone must cost him quite a lot, said Septimus, when they got out into the street.

She clung to his arm. They had been deserted.

But what more did she want?

To his patients he gave three-quarters of an hour; and if in this exacting science which has to do with what, after all, we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain—a doctor

loses his sense of proportion, as a doctor he fails. Health we must have; and health is proportion; so that when a man comes into your room and says he is Christ (a common delusion), and has a message, as they mostly have, and threatens, as they often do, to kill himself, you invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude; silence and rest; rest without friends, without books, without messages; six months' rest; until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve.²

Proportion, divine proportion, Sir William's goddess, was acquired by Sir William walking hospitals, catching salmon, begetting one son in Harley Street by Lady Bradshaw, who caught salmon herself and took photographs scarcely to be distinguished from the work of professionals. Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair; made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion—his, if they were men, Lady Bradshaw's if they were women (she embroidered, knitted, spent four nights out of seven at home with her son), so that not only did his colleagues respect him, his subordinates fear him, but the friends and relations of his patients felt for him the keenest gratitude for insisting that these prophetic Christs and Christesses, who prophesied the end of the world, or the advent of God, should drink milk in bed, as Sir William ordered; Sir William with his thirty years' experience of these kinds of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is madness, this sense; in fact, his sense of proportion.

But Proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged—in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieus³ of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts men to fall from the true belief which is her own—is even now engaged in dashing down shrines, smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. At Hyde Park Corner⁴ on a tub

she stands preaching; shrouds herself in white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied; bestows her blessing on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from her eyes the light of their own. This lady too (Rezia Warren Smith divined it) had her dwelling in Sir William's heart, though concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self sacrifice. How he would work—how toil to raise funds, propagate reforms, initiate institutions! But conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will. For example, Lady Bradshaw. Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission; dinner in Harley Street, numbering eight or nine courses, feeding ten or fifteen guests of the professional classes, was smooth and urbane. Only as the evening wore on a very slight dulness, or uneasiness perhaps, a nervous twitch, fumble, stumble and confusion indicated, what it was really painful to believe—that the poor lady lied. Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through; so that without knowing precisely what made the evening disagreeable, and caused this pressure on the top of the head (which might well be imputed to the professional conversation, or the fatigue of a great doctor whose life, Lady Bradshaw said, "is not his own but his patients' ") disagreeable it was: so that guests, when the clock struck ten, breathed in the air of Harley Street even with rapture; which relief, however, was denied to his patients.

There in the grey room, with the pictures on the wall, and the valuable furniture, under the ground glass skylight, they learnt the extent of their transgressions; huddled up in armchairs, they watched him go through, for their benefit, a curious exercise with the arms, which he shot out, brought sharply back to his hip, to

prove (if the patient was obstinate) that Sir William was master of his own actions, which the patient was not. There some weakly broke down; sobbed, submitted; others, inspired by Heaven knows what intemperate madness, called Sir William to his face a damnable humbug; questioned, even more impiously, life itself. Why live? they demanded. Sir William replied that life was good. Certainly Lady Bradshaw in ostrich feathers hung over the mantelpiece, and as for his income it was quite twelve thousand a year. But to us, they protested, life has given no such bounty. He acquiesced. They lacked a sense of proportion. And perhaps, after all, there is no God? He shrugged his shoulders. In short, this living or not living is an affair of our own? But there they were mistaken. Sir William had a friend in Surrey where they taught, what Sir William frankly admitted was a difficult art—a sense of proportion. There were, moreover, family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career. All of these had in Sir William a resolute champion. If they failed him, he had to support police and the good of society, which, he remarked very quietly, would take care, down in Surrey,⁵ that these unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control. And then stole out from her hiding-place and mounted her throne that Goddess whose lust is to override opposition, to stamp indelibly in the sanctuaries of others the image of herself. Naked, defenceless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up. It was this combination of decision and humanity that endeared Sir William so greatly to the relations of his victims.

But Rezia Warren Smith cried, walking down Harley Street, that she did not like that man.

Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced, genially and fraternally, as if it were a pleasure to

Messrs. Rigby and Lowndes to give the information gratis, that it was half-past one.

Looking up, it appeared that each letter of their names stood for one of the hours; subconsciously one was grateful to Rigby and Lowndes for giving one time ratified by Greenwich;⁶ and this gratitude (so Hugh Whitbread ruminated, dallying there in front of the shop window), naturally took the form later of buying off Rigby and Lowndes socks or shoes. So he ruminated. It was his habit. He did not go deeply. He brushed surfaces; the dead languages, the living, life in Constantinople, Paris, Rome; riding, shooting, tennis, it had been once. The malicious asserted that he now kept guard at Buckingham Palace, dressed in silk stockings and knee-breeches, over what nobody knew. But he did it extremely efficiently. He had been afloat on the cream of English society for fifty-five years. He had known Prime Ministers. His affections were understood to be deep. And if it were true that he had not taken part in any of the great movements of the time or held important office, one or two humble reforms stood to his credit; an improvement in public shelters was one; the protection of owls in Norfolk⁷ another; servant girls had reason to be grateful to him; and his name at the end of letters to the *Times*,⁸ asking for funds, appealing to the public to protect, to preserve, to clear up litter, to abate smoke, and stamp out immorality in parks, commanded respect.

A magnificent figure he cut too, pausing for a moment (as the sound of the half hour died away) to look critically, magisterially, at socks and shoes; impeccable, substantial, as if he beheld the world from a certain eminence, and dressed to match; but realised the obligations which size, wealth, health, entail, and observed punctiliously even when not absolutely necessary, little courtesies, old-fashioned ceremonies which gave a quality to his manner, something to imitate, something to remember him by, for he would never lunch, for example, with Lady Bruton, whom he had known these twenty years, without bringing her in his outstretched hand a bunch of carnations and asking Miss Brush, Lady Bruton's secretary, after her brother in South Africa, which, for some reason, Miss

Brush, deficient though she was in every attribute of female charm, so much resented that she said "Thank you, he's doing very well in South Africa," when, for half a dozen years, he had been doing badly in Portsmouth.⁹

Lady Bruton herself preferred Richard Dalloway, who arrived at the next moment. Indeed they met on the doorstep.

Lady Bruton preferred Richard Dalloway of course. He was made of much finer material. But she wouldn't let them run down her poor dear Hugh. She could never forget his kindness—he had been really remarkably kind—she forgot precisely upon what occasion. But he had been—remarkably kind. Anyhow, the difference between one man and another does not amount to much. She had never seen the sense of cutting people up, as Clarissa Dalloway did—cutting them up and sticking them together again; not at any rate when one was sixty-two. She took Hugh's carnations with her angular grim smile. There was nobody else coming, she said. She had got them there on false pretences, to help her out of a difficulty—

"But let us eat first," she said.

And so there began a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of aproned white-capped maids, handmaidens not of necessity, but adepts in a mystery or grand deception practised by hostesses in Mayfair¹ from one-thirty to two, when, with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases, and there rises instead this profound illusion in the first place about the food—how it is not paid for; and then that the table spreads itself voluntarily with glass and silver, little mats, saucers of red fruit; films of brown cream mask turbot;² in casseroles severed chickens swim; coloured, undomestic, the fire burns; and with the wine and the coffee (not paid for) rise jocund visions before musing eyes; gently speculative eyes; eyes to whom life appears musical, mysterious; eyes now kindled to observe genially the beauty of the red carnations which Lady Bruton (whose movements were always angular) had laid beside her plate, so that Hugh Whitbread, feeling at peace with the entire universe and at the same time completely sure of his standing, said, resting his fork,

"Wouldn't they look charming against your lace?"

Miss Brush resented this familiarity intensely. She thought him an underbred fellow. She made Lady Bruton laugh.

Lady Bruton raised the carnations, holding them rather stiffly with much the same attitude with which the General held the scroll in the picture behind her; she remained fixed, tranced. Which was she now, the General's great-grand-daughter? great-great-grand-daughter? Richard Dalloway asked himself. Sir Roderick, Sir Miles, Sir Talbot—that was it. It was remarkable how in that family the likeness persisted in the women. She should have been a general of dragoons³ herself. And Richard would have served under her, cheerfully; he had the greatest respect for her; he cherished these romantic views about well-set-up old women of pedigree, and would have liked, in his good-humoured way, to bring some young hot-heads of his acquaintance to lunch with her; as if a type like hers could be bred of amiable tea-drinking enthusiasts! He knew her country. He knew her people. There was a vine, still bearing, which either Lovelace or Herrick⁴—she never read a word of poetry herself, but so the story ran—had sat under. Better wait to put before them the question that bothered her (about making an appeal to the public; if so, in what terms and so on), better wait until they have had their coffee, Lady Bruton thought; and so laid the carnations down beside her plate.

"How's Clarissa?" she asked abruptly.

Clarissa always said that Lady Bruton did not like her. Indeed, Lady Bruton had the reputation of being more interested in politics than people; of talking like a man; of having had a finger in some notorious intrigue of the eighties, which was now beginning to be mentioned in memoirs. Certainly there was an alcove in her drawing-room, and a table in that alcove, and a photograph upon that table of General Sir Talbot Moore, now deceased, who had written there (one evening in the eighties) in Lady Bruton's presence, with her cognisance, perhaps advice, a telegram ordering the British troops to advance upon an historical occasion. (She kept the pen and told the story.) Thus, when she said in her offhand way "How's Clarissa?" husbands had difficulty in persuading their wives and indeed,

however devoted, were secretly doubtful themselves, of her interest in women who often got in their husbands' way, prevented them from accepting posts abroad, and had to be taken to the seaside in the middle of the session to recover from influenza. Nevertheless her inquiry, "How's Clarissa?" was known by women infallibly, to be a signal from a well-wisher, from an almost silent companion, whose utterances (half a dozen perhaps in the course of a lifetime) signified recognition of some feminine comradeship which went beneath masculine lunch parties and united Lady Bruton and Mrs. Dalloway, who seldom met, and appeared when they did meet indifferent and even hostile, in a singular bond.

"I met Clarissa in the Park this morning," said Hugh Whitbread, diving into the casserole, anxious to pay himself this little tribute, for he had only to come to London and he met everybody at once; but greedy, one of the greediest men she had ever known, Milly Brush thought, who observed men with unflinching rectitude, and was capable of everlasting devotion, to her own sex in particular, being knobbed, scraped, angular, and entirely without feminine charm.

"D'you know who's in town?" said Lady Bruton suddenly bethinking her. "Our old friend, Peter Walsh."

They all smiled. Peter Walsh! And Mr. Dalloway was genuinely glad, Milly Brush thought; and Mr. Whitbread thought only of his chicken.

Peter Walsh! All three, Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard Dalloway, remembered the same thing—how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper;⁵ made a mess of things; and Richard Dalloway had a very great liking for the dear old fellow too. Milly Brush saw that; saw a depth in the brown of his eyes; saw him hesitate; consider; which interested her, as Mr. Dalloway always interested her, for what was he thinking, she wondered, about Peter Walsh?

That Peter Walsh had been in love with Clarissa; that he would go back directly after lunch and find Clarissa; that he would tell her, in so many words, that he loved her. Yes, he would say that.

Milly Brush once might almost have fallen in love with these silences; and Mr. Dalloway was always so dependable; such a gentleman too. Now, being forty, Lady Bruton had only to nod, or turn her head a little abruptly, and Milly Brush took the signal, however deeply she might be sunk in these reflections of a detached spirit, of an uncorrupted soul whom life could not bamboozle, because life had not offered her a trinket of the slightest value; not a curl, smile, lip, cheek, nose; nothing whatever; Lady Bruton had only to nod, and Perkins was instructed to quicken the coffee.

"Yes; Peter Walsh has come back," said Lady Bruton. It was vaguely flattering to them all. He had come back, battered, unsuccessful, to their secure shores. But to help him, they reflected, was impossible; there was some flaw in his character. Hugh Whitbread said one might of course mention his name to So-and-so. He wrinkled lugubriously, consequentially, at the thought of the letters he would write to the heads of Government offices about "my old friend, Peter Walsh," and so on. But it wouldn't lead to anything—not to anything permanent, because of his character.

"In trouble with some woman," said Lady Bruton. They had all guessed that *that* was at the bottom of it.

"However," said Lady Bruton, anxious to leave the subject, "we shall hear the whole story from Peter himself."

(The coffee was very slow in coming.)

"The address?" murmured Hugh Whitbread; and there was at once a ripple in the grey tide of service which washed round Lady Bruton day in, day out, collecting, intercepting, enveloping her in a fine tissue which broke concussions, mitigated interruptions, and spread round the house in Brook Street⁶ a fine net where things lodged and were picked out accurately, instantly, by grey-haired Perkins, who had been with Lady Bruton these thirty years and now wrote down the address; handed it to Mr. Whitbread, who took out his pocketbook, raised his eyebrows, and slipping it in among documents of the highest importance, said that he would get Evelyn to ask him to lunch.

(They were waiting to bring the coffee until Mr. Whitbread had finished.)

Hugh was very slow, Lady Bruton thought. He was getting fat, she noticed. Richard always kept himself in the pink of condition.⁷ She was getting impatient; the whole of her being was setting positively, undeniably, domineeringly brushing aside all this unnecessary trifling (Peter Walsh and his affairs) upon that subject which engaged her attention, and not merely her attention, but that fibre which was the ramrod of her soul, that essential part of her without which Millicent Bruton would not have been Millicent Bruton; that project for emigrating young people of both sexes born of respectable parents and setting them up with a fair prospect of doing well in Canada.⁸ She exaggerated. She had perhaps lost her sense of proportion. Emigration was not to others the obvious remedy, the sublime conception. It was not to them (not to Hugh, or Richard, or even to devoted Miss Brush) the liberator of the pent⁹ egotism, which a strong martial woman, well nourished, well descended, of direct impulses, downright feelings, and little introspective power (broad and simple—why could not every one be broad and simple? she asked) feels rise within her, once youth is past, and must eject upon some object—it may be Emigration, it may be Emancipation; but whatever it be, this object round which the essence of her soul is daily secreted, becomes inevitably prismatic, lustrous, half looking-glass, half precious stone; now carefully hidden in case people should sneer at it; now proudly displayed. Emigration had become, in short, largely Lady Bruton.

But she had to write. And one letter to the *Times*, she used to say to Miss Brush, cost her more than to organise an expedition to South Africa (which she had done in the war). After a morning's battle beginning, tearing up, beginning again, she used to feel the futility of her own womanhood as she felt it on no other occasion, and would turn gratefully to the thought of Hugh Whitbread who possessed—no one could doubt it—the art of writing letters to the *Times*.

A being so differently constituted from herself, with such a command of language; able to put things as editors like them put; had passions which one could not call simply greed. Lady Bruton often suspended judgement upon men in deference to the mysterious accord in which they, but no woman, stood to the laws of the universe; knew how to put things; knew what was said; so that if Richard advised her, and Hugh wrote for her, she was sure of being somehow right. So she let Hugh eat his soufflé; asked after poor Evelyn; waited until they were smoking, and then said,

"Milly, would you fetch the papers?"

And Miss Brush went out, came back; laid papers on the table; and Hugh produced his fountain pen; his silver fountain pen, which had done twenty years' service, he said, unscrewing the cap. It was still in perfect order; he had shown it to the makers; there was no reason, they said, why it should ever wear out; which was somehow to Hugh's credit, and to the credit of the sentiments which his pen expressed (so Richard Dalloway felt) as Hugh began carefully writing capital letters with rings round them in the margin, and thus marvellously reduced Lady Bruton's tangles to sense, to grammar such as the editor of the *Times*, Lady Bruton felt, watching the marvellous transformation, must respect. Hugh was slow. Hugh was pertinacious. Richard said one must take risks. Hugh proposed modifications in deference to people's feelings, which, he said rather tartly when Richard laughed, "had to be considered," and read out "how, therefore, we are of opinion that the times are ripe . . . the superfluous youth of our ever-increasing population . . . what we owe to the dead . . ." which Richard thought all stuffing and bunkum, but no harm in it, of course, and Hugh went on drafting sentiments in alphabetical order of the highest nobility, brushing the cigar ash from his waistcoat, and summing up now and then the progress they had made until, finally, he read out the draft of a letter which Lady Bruton felt certain was a masterpiece. Could her own meaning sound like that?

Hugh could not guarantee that the editor would put it in; but he would be meeting somebody at luncheon.

Whereupon Lady Bruton, who seldom did a graceful thing, stuffed all Hugh's carnations into the front of her dress, and flinging her hands out called him "My Prime Minister!" What she would have done without them both she did not know. They rose. And Richard Dalloway strolled off as usual to have a look at the General's portrait, because he meant, whenever he had a moment of leisure, to write a history of Lady Bruton's family.

And Millicent Bruton was very proud of her family. But they could wait, they could wait, she said, looking at the picture; meaning that her family, of military men, administrators, admirals, had been men of action, who had done their duty; and Richard's first duty was to his country, but it was a fine face, she said; and all the papers were ready for Richard down at Aldmixton whenever the time came; the Labour Government¹ she meant. "Ah, the news from India!" she cried.

And then, as they stood in the hall taking yellow gloves from the bowl on the malachite² table and Hugh was offering Miss Brush with quite unnecessary courtesy some discarded ticket or other compliment, which she loathed from the depths of her heart and blushed brick red, Richard turned to Lady Bruton, with his hat in his hand, and said,

"We shall see you at our party to-night?" whereupon Lady Bruton resumed the magnificence which letter-writing had shattered. She might come; or she might not come. Clarissa had wonderful energy. Parties terrified Lady Bruton. But then, she was getting old. So she intimated, standing at her doorway; handsome; very erect; while her chow stretched behind her, and Miss Brush disappeared into the background with her hands full of papers.

And Lady Bruton went ponderously, majestically, up to her room, lay, one arm extended, on the sofa. She sighed, she snored, not that she was asleep, only drowsy and heavy, drowsy and heavy, like a field of clover in the sunshine this hot June day, with the bees going round and about and the yellow butterflies. Always she went back to those fields down in Devonshire,³ where she had jumped the brooks on Patty, her pony, with Mortimer and Tom, her brothers. And there

were the dogs; there were the rats; there were her father and mother on the lawn under the trees, with the tea-things out, and the beds of dahlias, the hollyhocks, the pampas grass; and they, little wretches, always up to some mischief! stealing back through the shrubbery, so as not to be seen, all bedraggled from some roguery. What old nurse used to say about her frocks!

Ah dear, she remembered—it was Wednesday in Brook Street. Those kind good fellows, Richard Dalloway, Hugh Whitbread, had gone this hot day through the streets whose growl came up to her lying on the sofa. Power was hers, position, income. She had lived in the forefront of her time. She had had good friends; known the ablest men of her day. Murmuring London flowed up to her, and her hand, lying on the sofa back, curled upon some imaginary baton such as her grandfathers might have held, holding which she seemed, drowsy and heavy, to be commanding battalions marching to Canada, and those good fellows walking across London, that territory of theirs, that little bit of carpet, Mayfair.

And they went further and further from her, being attached to her by a thin thread (since they had lunched with her) which would stretch and stretch, get thinner and thinner as they walked across London; as if one's friends were attached to one's body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread, which (as she dozed there) became hazy with the sound of bells, striking the hour or ringing to service, as a single spider's thread is blotted with rain-drops, and, burdened, sags down. So she slept.

And Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread hesitated at the corner of Conduit Street⁴ at the very moment that Millicent Bruton, lying on the sofa, let the thread snap; snored. Contrary winds buffeted at the street corner. They looked in at a shop window; they did not wish to buy or to talk but to part, only with contrary winds buffeting the street corner, with some sort of lapse in the tides of the body, two forces meeting in a swirl, morning and afternoon, they paused. Some newspaper placard went up in the air, gallantly, like a kite at first, then paused, swooped, fluttered; and a lady's veil hung. Yellow awnings trembled. The speed of the morning traffic

slackened, and single carts rattled carelessly down half-empty streets. In Norfolk, of which Richard Dalloway was half thinking, a soft warm wind blew back the petals; confused the waters; ruffled the flowering grasses. Haymakers, who had pitched beneath hedges to sleep away the morning toil, parted curtains of green blades; moved trembling globes of cow parsley to see the sky, the blue, the steadfast, the blazing summer sky.

Aware that he was looking at a silver two-handled Jacobean⁵ mug, and that Hugh Whitbread admired condescendingly with airs of connoisseurship a Spanish necklace which he thought of asking the price of in case Evelyn might like it—still Richard was torpid; could not think or move. Life had thrown up this wreckage; shop windows full of coloured paste, and one stood stark with the lethargy of the old, stiff with the rigidity of the old, looking in. Evelyn Whitbread might like to buy this Spanish necklace—so she might. Yawn he must. Hugh was going into the shop.

“Right you are!” said Richard, following.

Goodness knows he didn’t want to go buying necklaces with Hugh. But there are tides in the body. Morning meets afternoon. Borne like a frail shallop⁶ on deep, deep floods, Lady Bruton’s great-grandfather and his memoir and his campaigns in North America were whelmed and sunk. And Millicent Bruton too. She went under. Richard didn’t care a straw what became of Emigration; about that letter, whether the editor put it in or not. The necklace hung stretched between Hugh’s admirable fingers. Let him give it to a girl, if he must buy jewels—any girl, any girl in the street. For the worthlessness of this life did strike Richard pretty forcibly—buying necklaces for Evelyn. If he’d had a boy he’d have said, Work, work. But he had his Elizabeth; he adored his Elizabeth.

“I should like to see Mr. Dubonnet,” said Hugh in his curt worldly way. It appeared that this Dubonnet had the measurements of Mrs. Whitbread’s neck, or, more strangely still, knew her views upon Spanish jewellery and the extent of her possessions in that line (which Hugh could not remember). All of which seemed to Richard Dalloway awfully odd. For he never gave Clarissa presents, except a

bracelet two or three years ago, which had not been a success. She never wore it. It pained him to remember that she never wore it. And as a single spider's thread after wavering here and there attaches itself to the point of a leaf, so Richard's mind, recovering from its lethargy, set now on his wife, Clarissa, whom Peter Walsh had loved so passionately; and Richard had had a sudden vision of her there at luncheon; of himself and Clarissa; of their life together; and he drew the tray of old jewels towards him, and taking up first this brooch then that ring, "How much is that?" he asked, but doubted his own taste. He wanted to open the drawing-room door and come in holding out something; a present for Clarissa. Only what? But Hugh was on his legs again. He was unspeakably pompous. Really, after dealing here for thirty-five years he was not going to be put off by a mere boy who did not know his business. For Dubonnet, it seemed, was out, and Hugh would not buy anything until Mr. Dubonnet chose to be in; at which the youth flushed and bowed his correct little bow. It was all perfectly correct. And yet Richard couldn't have said that to save his life! Why these people stood that damned insolence he could not conceive. Hugh was becoming an intolerable ass. Richard Dalloway could not stand more than an hour of his society. And, flicking his bowler hat by way of farewell, Richard turned at the corner of Conduit Street eager, yes, very eager, to travel that spider's thread of attachment between himself and Clarissa; he would go straight to her, in Westminster.

But he wanted to come in holding something. Flowers? Yes, flowers, since he did not trust his taste in gold; any number of flowers, roses, orchids, to celebrate what was, reckoning things as you will, an event; this feeling about her when they spoke of Peter Walsh at luncheon; and they never spoke of it; not for years had they spoken of it; which, he thought, grasping his red and white roses together (a vast bunch in tissue paper), is the greatest mistake in the world. The time comes when it can't be said; one's too shy to say it, he thought, pocketing his sixpence or two of change, setting off with his great bunch held against his body to Westminster to say straight out in so many words (whatever she might think of him),

holding out his flowers, "I love you." Why not? Really it was a miracle thinking of the war, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle. Here he was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her. Which one never does say, he thought. Partly one's lazy; partly one's shy. And Clarissa—it was difficult to think of her; except in starts, as at luncheon, when he saw her quite distinctly; their whole life. He stopped at the crossing; and repeated—being simple by nature, and undebauched, because he had tramped, and shot; being pertinacious and dogged, having championed the downtrodden and followed his instincts in the House of Commons; being preserved in his simplicity yet at the same time grown rather speechless, rather stiff—he repeated that it was a miracle that he should have married Clarissa; a miracle—his life had been a miracle, he thought; hesitating to cross. But it did make his blood boil to see little creatures of five or six crossing Piccadilly alone. The police ought to have stopped the traffic at once. He had no illusions about the London police. Indeed, he was collecting evidence of their malpractices; and those costermongers,⁷ not allowed to stand their barrows in the streets; and prostitutes, good Lord, the fault wasn't in them, nor in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth; all of which he considered, could be seen considering, grey, dogged, dapper, clean, as he walked across the Park to tell his wife that he loved her.

For he would say it in so many words, when he came into the room. Because it is a thousand pities never to say what one feels, he thought, crossing the Green Park and observing with pleasure how in the shade of the trees whole families, poor families, were sprawling; children kicking up their legs; sucking milk; paper bags thrown about, which could easily be picked up (if people objected) by one of those fat gentlemen in livery;⁸ for he was of opinion that every park, and every square, during the summer months should be open to children (the grass of the park flushed and faded, lighting up the poor mothers of Westminster and their crawling babies, as if a yellow lamp were moved beneath). But what could be done for

female vagrants like that poor creature, stretched on her elbow (as if she had flung herself on the earth, rid of all ties, to observe curiously, to speculate boldly, to consider the whys and the wherefores, impudent, loose-lipped, humorous), he did not know. Bearing his flowers like a weapon, Richard Dalloway approached her; intent he passed her; still there was time for a spark between them—she laughed at the sight of him, he smiled good-humouredly, considering the problem of the female vagrant; not that they would ever speak. But he would tell Clarissa that he loved her, in so many words. He had, once upon a time, been jealous of Peter Walsh; jealous of him and Clarissa. But she had often said to him that she had been right not to marry Peter Walsh; which, knowing Clarissa, was obviously true; she wanted support. Not that she was weak; but she wanted support.

As for Buckingham Palace (like an old prima donna facing the audience all in white) you can't deny it a certain dignity, he considered, nor despise what does, after all, stand to millions of people (a little crowd was waiting at the gate to see the King drive out) for a symbol, absurd though it is; a child with a box of bricks could have done better, he thought; looking at the memorial to Queen Victoria (whom he could remember in her horn spectacles driving through Kensington), its white mound, its billowing motherliness; but he liked being ruled by the descendant of Horsa;⁹ he liked continuity; and the sense of handing on the traditions of the past. It was a great age in which to have lived. Indeed, his own life was a miracle; let him make no mistake about it; here he was, in the prime of life, walking to his house in Westminster to tell Clarissa that he loved her. Happiness is this, he thought.

It is this, he said, as he entered Dean's Yard.¹ Big Ben was beginning to strike, first the warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. Lunch parties waste the entire afternoon, he thought, approaching his door.

The sound of Big Ben flooded Clarissa's drawing-room, where she sat, ever so annoyed, at her writing-table; worried; annoyed. It was perfectly true that she had not asked Ellie Henderson to her party;

but she had done it on purpose. Now Mrs. Marsham wrote "she had told Ellie Henderson she would ask Clarissa—Ellie so much wanted to come."

But why should she invite all the dull women in London to her parties? Why should Mrs. Marsham interfere? And there was Elizabeth closeted all this time with Doris Kilman. Anything more nauseating she could not conceive. Prayer at this hour with that woman. And the sound of the bell flooded the room with its melancholy wave; which receded, and gathered itself together to fall once more, when she heard, distractingly, something fumbling, something scratching at the door. Who at this hour? Three, good Heavens! Three already! For with overpowering directness and dignity the clock struck three; and she heard nothing else; but the door handle slipped round and in came Richard! What a surprise! In came Richard, holding out flowers. She had failed him, once at Constantinople; and Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her. He was holding out flowers—roses, red and white roses. (But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words.)

But how lovely, she said, taking his flowers. She understood; she understood without his speaking; his Clarissa. She put them in vases on the mantelpiece. How lovely they looked! she said. And was it amusing, she asked? Had Lady Bruton asked after her? Peter Walsh was back. Mrs. Marsham had written. Must she ask Ellie Henderson? That woman Kilman was upstairs.

"But let us sit down for five minutes," said Richard.

It all looked so empty. All the chairs were against the wall. What had they been doing? Oh, it was for the party; no, he had not forgotten, the party. Peter Walsh was back. Oh yes; she had had him. And he was going to get a divorce; and he was in love with some woman out there. And he hadn't changed in the slightest. There she was, mending her dress. . . .

"Thinking of Bourton," she said.

"Hugh was at lunch," said Richard. She had met him too! Well, he was getting absolutely intolerable. Buying Evelyn necklaces; fatter

than ever; an intolerable ass.

"And it came over me 'I might have married you,' " she said, thinking of Peter sitting there in his little bow-tie; with that knife, opening it, shutting it. "Just as he always was, you know."

They were talking about him at lunch, said Richard. (But he could not tell her he loved her. He held her hand. Happiness is this, he thought.) They had been writing a letter to the *Times* for Millicent Bruton. That was about all Hugh was fit for.

"And our dear Miss Kilman?" he asked. Clarissa thought the roses absolutely lovely, first bunched together; now of their own accord starting apart.

"Kilman arrives just as we've done lunch," she said. "Elizabeth turns pink. They shut themselves up. I suppose they're praying."

Lord! He didn't like it; but these things pass over if you let them.

"In a mackintosh with an umbrella," said Clarissa.

He had not said "I love you"; but he held her hand. Happiness is this, is this, he thought.

"But why should I ask all the dull women in London to my parties?" said Clarissa. And if Mrs. Marsham gave a party, did *she* invite her guests?

"Poor Ellie Henderson," said Richard—it was a very odd thing how much Clarissa minded about her parties, he thought.

But Richard had no notion of the look of a room. However—what was he going to say?

If she worried about these parties he would not let her give them. Did she wish she had married Peter? But he must go.

He must be off, he said, getting up. But he stood for a moment as if he were about to say something; and she wondered what? Why? There were the roses.

"Some Committee?" she asked, as he opened the door.

"Armenians," he said; or perhaps it was "Albanians."²

And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it

oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect—something, after all, priceless.

He returned with a pillow and a quilt.

"An hour's complete rest after luncheon," he said. And he went.

How like him! He would go on saying "An hour's complete rest after luncheon" to the end of time, because a doctor had ordered it once. It was like him to take what doctors said literally; part of his adorable, divine simplicity, which no one had to the same extent; which made him go and do the thing while she and Peter frittered their time away bickering. He was already halfway to the House of Commons, to his Armenians, his Albanians, having settled her on the sofa, looking at his roses. And people would say, "Clarissa Dalloway is spoilt." She cared much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen, the victims of cruelty and injustice (she had heard Richard say so over and over again)—no, she could feel nothing for the Albanians, or was it the Armenians? but she loved her roses (didn't that help the Armenians?)—the only flowers she could bear to see cut. But Richard was already at the House of Commons; at his Committee, having settled all her difficulties. But no; alas, that was not true. He did not see the reasons against asking Ellie Henderson. She would do it, of course, as he wished it. Since he had brought the pillows, she would lie down. . . . But—but—why did she suddenly feel, for no reason that she could discover, desperately unhappy? As a person who has dropped some grain of pearl or diamond into the grass and parts the tall blades very carefully, this way and that, and searches here and there vainly, and at last spies it there at the roots, so she went through one thing and another; no, it was not Sally Seton saying that Richard would never be in the Cabinet because he had a second-class brain (it came back to her); no, she did not mind that; nor was it to do with Elizabeth either and Doris Kilman; those were facts. It was a feeling, some unpleasant feeling, earlier in the day perhaps; something that Peter had said, combined with some depression of her own, in her bedroom, taking off her hat; and what

Richard had said had added to it, but what had he said? There were his roses. Her parties! That was it! Her parties! Both of them criticised her very unfairly, laughed at her very unjustly, for her parties. That was it! That was it!

Well, how was she going to defend herself? Now that she knew what it was, she felt perfectly happy. They thought, or Peter at any rate thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob in short. Well, Peter might think so. Richard merely thought it foolish of her to like excitement when she knew it was bad for her heart. It was childish, he thought. And both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life.

"That's what I do it for," she said, speaking aloud, to life.

Since she was lying on the sofa, cloistered, exempt, the presence of this thing which she felt to be so obvious became physically existent; with robes of sound from the street, sunny, with hot breath, whispering, blowing out the blinds. But suppose Peter said to her, "Yes, yes, but your parties—what's the sense of your parties?" all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand): They're an offering; which sounded horribly vague. But who was Peter to make out that life was all plain sailing?—Peter always in love, always in love with the wrong woman? What's your love? she might say to him. And she knew his answer; how it is the most important thing in the world and no woman possibly understood it. Very well. But could any man understand what she meant either? about life? She could not imagine Peter or Richard taking the trouble to give a party for no reason whatever.

But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgements, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bayswater;³ and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be

brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom?

An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know.

All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park; meet Hugh Whitbread; then suddenly in came Peter; then these roses; it was enough. After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how, every instant . . .

The door opened. Elizabeth knew that her mother was resting. She came in very quietly. She stood perfectly still. Was it that some Mongol⁴ had been wrecked on the coast of Norfolk (as Mrs. Hilbery said), had mixed with the Dalloway ladies, perhaps, a hundred years ago? For the Dalloways, in general, were fair-haired; blue-eyed; Elizabeth, on the contrary, was dark; had Chinese eyes⁵ in a pale face; an Oriental mystery; was gentle, considerate, still. As a child, she had had a perfect sense of humour; but now at seventeen, why, Clarissa could not in the least understand, she had become very serious; like a hyacinth, sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted, a hyacinth which has had no sun.

She stood quite still and looked at her mother; but the door was ajar, and outside the door was Miss Kilman, as Clarissa knew; Miss Kilman in her mackintosh, listening to whatever they said.

Yes, Miss Kilman stood on the landing, and wore a mackintosh; but had her reasons. First, it was cheap; second, she was over forty; and did not, after all, dress to please. She was poor, moreover; degradingly poor. Otherwise she would not be taking jobs from people like the Dalloways; from rich people, who liked to be kind. Mr. Dalloway, to do him justice, had been kind. But Mrs. Dalloway had not. She had been merely condescending. She came from the most

worthless of all classes—the rich, with a smattering of culture. They had expensive things everywhere; pictures, carpets, lots of servants. She considered that she had a perfect right to anything that the Dalloways did for her.

She had been cheated. Yes, the word was no exaggeration, for surely a girl has a right to some kind of happiness? And she had never been happy, what with being so clumsy and so poor. And then, just as she might have had a chance at Miss Dolby's school, the war came; and she had never been able to tell lies. Miss Dolby thought she would be happier with people who shared her views about the Germans. She had had to go. It was true that the family was of German origin; spelt the name Kiehlman in the eighteenth century; but her brother had been killed. They turned her out because she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains—when she had German friends, when the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany! And after all, she could read history. She had had to take whatever she could get. Mr. Dalloway had come across her working for the Friends.⁶ He had allowed her (and that was really generous of him) to teach his daughter history. Also she did a little Extension lecturing⁷ and so on. Then Our Lord had come to her (and here she always bowed her head). She had seen the light two years and three months ago. Now she did not envy women like Clarissa Dalloway; she pitied them.

She pitied and despised them from the bottom of her heart, as she stood on the soft carpet, looking at the old engraving of a little girl with a muff.⁸ With all this luxury going on, what hope was there for a better state of things? Instead of lying on a sofa—"My mother is resting," Elizabeth had said—she should have been in a factory; behind a counter; Mrs. Dalloway and all the other fine ladies!

Bitter and burning, Miss Kilman had turned in to a church two years three months ago. She had heard the Rev. Edward Whittaker preach; the boys sing; had seen the solemn lights descend, and whether it was the music, or the voices (she herself when alone in the evening found comfort in a violin; but the sound was excruciating; she had no ear), the hot and turbulent feelings which

boiled and surged in her had been assuaged as she sat there, and she had wept copiously, and gone to call on Mr. Whittaker at his private house in Kensington. It was the hand of God, he said. The Lord had shown her the way. So now, whenever the hot and painful feelings boiled within her, this hatred of Mrs. Dalloway, this grudge against the world, she thought of God. She thought of Mr. Whittaker. Rage was succeeded by calm. A sweet savour filled her veins, her lips parted, and, standing formidable upon the landing in her mackintosh, she looked with steady and sinister serenity at Mrs. Dalloway, who came out with her daughter.

Elizabeth said she had forgotten her gloves. That was because Miss Kilman and her mother hated each other. She could not bear to see them together. She ran upstairs to find her gloves.

But Miss Kilman did not hate Mrs. Dalloway. Turning her large gooseberry-coloured eyes upon Clarissa, observing her small pink face, her delicate body, her air of freshness and fashion, Miss Kilman felt, Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure; who have trifled your life away! And there rose in her an overmastering desire to overcome her; to unmask her. If she could have felled her it would have eased her. But it was not the body; it was the soul and its mockery that she wished to subdue; make feel her mastery. If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying, You are right! But this was God's will, not Miss Kilman's. It was to be a religious victory. So she glared; so she glowered.

Clarissa was really shocked. This a Christian—this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her! She in touch with invisible presences! Heavy, ugly, commonplace, without kindness or grace, she know the meaning of life!

"You are taking Elizabeth to the Stores?"⁹ Mrs. Dalloway said.

Miss Kilman said she was. They stood there. Miss Kilman was not going to make herself agreeable. She had always earned her living. Her knowledge of modern history was thorough in the extreme. She did out of her meagre income set aside so much for causes she believed in; whereas this woman did nothing, believed nothing;

brought up her daughter—but here was Elizabeth, rather out of breath, the beautiful girl.

So they were going to the Stores. Odd it was, as Miss Kilman stood there (and stand she did, with the power and taciturnity of some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare), how, second by second, the idea of her diminished, how hatred (which was for ideas, not people) crumbled, how she lost her malignity, her size, became second by second merely Miss Kilman, in a mackintosh, whom Heaven knows Clarissa would have liked to help.

At this dwindling of the monster, Clarissa laughed. Saying good-bye, she laughed.

Off they went together, Miss Kilman and Elizabeth, downstairs.

With a sudden impulse, with a violent anguish, for this woman was taking her daughter from her, Clarissa leant over the bannisters and cried out, "Remember the party! Remember our party to-night!"

But Elizabeth had already opened the front door; there was a van passing; she did not answer.

Love and religion! thought Clarissa, going back into the drawing-room, tingling all over. How detestable, how detestable they are! For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, it overwhelmed her—the idea. The crudest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering, hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion. Had she ever tried to convert any one herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her, gain her bedroom, part her curtains, and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that—that old woman looking out of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it—but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. The odious Kilman would destroy it. Yet it was a sight that made her want to cry.

Love destroyed too. Everything that was fine, everything that was true went. Take Peter Walsh now. There was a man, charming, clever, with ideas about everything. If you wanted to know about Pope, say, or Addison,¹ or just to talk nonsense, what people were like, what things meant, Peter knew better than any one. It was Peter who had helped her; Peter who had lent her books. But look at the women he loved—vulgar, trivial, commonplace. Think of Peter in love—he came to see her after all these years, and what did he talk about? Himself. Horrible passion! she thought. Degrading passion! she thought, thinking of Kilman and her Elizabeth walking to the Army and Navy Stores.

Big Ben struck the half-hour.

How extraordinary it was, strange, yes, touching, to see the old lady (they had been neighbours ever so many years) move away from the window, as if she were attached to that sound, that string. Gigantic as it was, it had something to do with her. Down, down, into the midst of ordinary things the finger fell making the moment solemn. She was forced, so Clarissa imagined, by that sound, to move, to go—but where? Clarissa tried to follow her as she turned and disappeared, and could still just see her white cap moving at the back of the bedroom. She was still there moving about at the other end of the room. Why creeds and prayers and mackintoshes? when, thought Clarissa, that's the miracle, that's the mystery; that old lady, she meant, whom she could see going from chest of drawers to dressing-table. She could still see her. And the supreme mystery which Kilman might say she had solved, or Peter might say he had solved, but Clarissa didn't believe either of them had the ghost of an idea of solving, was simply this: here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?

Love—but here the other clock, the clock which always struck two minutes after Big Ben, came shuffling in with its lap full of odds and ends, which it dumped down as if Big Ben were all very well with his majesty laying down the law, so solemn, so just, but she must remember all sorts of little things besides—Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices—all sorts of little things came flooding

and lapping and dancing in on the wake of that solemn stroke which lay flat like a bar of gold on the sea. Mrs. Marsham, Ellie Henderson, glasses for ices. She must telephone now at once.

Volubly, troublously, the late clock sounded, coming in on the wake of Big Ben, with its lap full of trifles. Beaten up, broken up by the assault of carriages, the brutality of vans, the eager advance of myriads of angular men, of flaunting women, the domes and spires of offices and hospitals, the last relics of this lap full of odds and ends seemed to break, like the spray of an exhausted wave, upon the body of Miss Kilman standing still in the street for a moment to mutter "It is the flesh."

It was the flesh that she must control. Clarissa Dalloway had insulted her. That she expected. But she had not triumphed; she had not mastered the flesh. Ugly, clumsy, Clarissa Dalloway had laughed at her for being that; and had revived the fleshly desires, for she minded looking as she did beside Clarissa. Nor could she talk as she did. But why wish to resemble her? Why? She despised Mrs. Dalloway from the bottom of her heart. She was not serious. She was not good. Her life was a tissue of vanity and deceit. Yet Doris Kilman had been overcome. She had, as a matter of fact, very nearly burst into tears when Clarissa Dalloway laughed at her. "It is the flesh, it is the flesh," she muttered (it being her habit to talk aloud) trying to subdue this turbulent and painful feeling as she walked down Victoria Street. She prayed to God. She could not help being ugly; she could not afford to buy pretty clothes. Clarissa Dalloway had laughed—but she would concentrate her mind upon something else until she had reached the pillar-box.² At any rate she had got Elizabeth. But she would think of something else; she would think of Russia; until she reached the pillar-box.

How nice it must be, she said, in the country, struggling, as Mr. Whittaker had told her, with that violent grudge against the world which had scorned her, sneered at her, cast her off, beginning with this indignity—the infliction of her unlovable body which people could not bear to see. Do her hair as she might, her forehead remained like an egg, bald, white. No clothes suited her. She might

buy anything. And for a woman, of course, that meant never meeting the opposite sex. Never would she come first with any one. Sometimes lately it had seemed to her that, except for Elizabeth, her food was all that she lived for; her comforts; her dinner, her tea; her hot-water bottle at night. But one must fight; vanquish; have faith in God. Mr. Whittaker had said she was there for a purpose. But no one knew the agony! He said, pointing to the crucifix, that God knew. But why should she have to suffer when other women, like Clarissa Dalloway, escaped? Knowledge comes through suffering, said Mr. Whittaker.

She had passed the pillar-box, and Elizabeth had turned into the cool brown tobacco department of the Army and Navy Stores while she was still muttering to herself what Mr. Whittaker had said about knowledge coming through suffering and the flesh. "The flesh," she muttered.

What department did she want? Elizabeth interrupted her.

"Petticoats," she said abruptly, and stalked straight on to the lift.

Up they went. Elizabeth guided her this way and that; guided her in her abstraction as if she had been a great child, an unwieldy battleship. There were the petticoats, brown, decorous, striped, frivolous, solid, flimsy; and she chose, in her abstraction, portentously, and the girl serving thought her mad.

Elizabeth rather wondered, as they did up the parcel, what Miss Kilman was thinking. They must have their tea, said Miss Kilman, rousing, collecting herself. They had their tea.

Elizabeth rather wondered whether Miss Kilman could be hungry. It was her way of eating, eating with intensity, then looking, again and again, at a plate of sugared cakes on the table next them; then, when a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake, could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake—the pink one. The pleasure of eating was almost the only pure pleasure left her, and then to be baffled even in that!

When people are happy, they have a reserve, she had told Elizabeth, upon which to draw, whereas she was like a wheel without a tyre (she was fond of such metaphors), jolted by every

pebble, so she would say staying on after the lesson standing by the fire-place with her bag of books, her "satchel," she called it, on a Tuesday morning, after the lesson was over. And she talked too about the war. After all, there were people who did not think the English invariably right. There were books. There were meetings. There were other points of view. Would Elizabeth like to come with her to listen to So-and-so (a most extraordinary looking old man)? Then Miss Kilman took her to some church in Kensington and they had tea with a clergyman. She had lent her books. Law, medicine, politics, all professions are open to women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. But for herself, her career was absolutely ruined and was it her fault? Good gracious, said Elizabeth, no.

And her mother would come calling to say that a hamper had come from Bourton and would Miss Kilman like some flowers? To Miss Kilman she was always very, very nice, but Miss Kilman squashed the flowers all in a bunch, and hadn't any small talk, and what interested Miss Kilman bored her mother, and Miss Kilman and she were terrible together; and Miss Kilman swelled and looked very plain. But then Miss Kilman was frightfully clever. Elizabeth had never thought about the poor. They lived with everything they wanted,—her mother had breakfast in bed every day; Lucy carried it up; and she liked old women because they were Duchesses, and being descended from some Lord. But Miss Kilman said (one of those Tuesday mornings when the lesson was over), "My grandfather kept an oil and colour shop³ in Kensington." Miss Kilman made one feel so small.

Miss Kilman took another cup of tea. Elizabeth, with her oriental bearing, her inscrutable mystery, sat perfectly upright; no, she did not want anything more. She looked for her gloves—her white gloves. They were under the table. Ah, but she must not go! Miss Kilman could not let her go! this youth, that was so beautiful, this girl, whom she genuinely loved! Her large hand opened and shut on the table.

But perhaps it was a little flat somehow, Elizabeth felt. And really she would like to go.

But said Miss Kilman, "I've not quite finished yet."

Of course, then, Elizabeth would wait. But it was rather stuffy in here.

"Are you going to the party to-night?" Miss Kilman said. Elizabeth supposed she was going; her mother wanted her to go. She must not let parties absorb her, Miss Kilman said, fingering the last two inches of a chocolate éclair.

She did not much like parties, Elizabeth said. Miss Kilman opened her mouth, slightly projected her chin, and swallowed down the last inches of the chocolate éclair, then wiped her fingers, and washed the tea round in her cup.

She was about to split asunder, she felt. The agony was so terrific. If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted. But to sit here, unable to think of anything to say; to see Elizabeth turning against her; to be felt repulsive even by her—it was too much; she could not stand it. The thick fingers curled inwards.

"I never go to parties," said Miss Kilman, just to keep Elizabeth from going. "People don't ask me to parties"—and she knew as she said it that it was this egotism that was her undoing; Mr. Whittaker had warned her; but she could not help it. She had suffered so horribly. "Why should they ask me?" she said. "I'm plain, I'm unhappy." She knew it was idiotic. But it was all those people passing—people with parcels who despised her, who made her say it. However, she was Doris Kilman. She had her degree. She was a woman who had made her way in the world. Her knowledge of modern history was more than respectable.

"I don't pity myself," she said. "I pity"—she meant to say "your mother" but no, she could not, not to Elizabeth. "I pity other people," she said, "more."

Like some dumb creature who has been brought up to a gate for an unknown purpose, and stands there longing to gallop away, Elizabeth Dalloway sat silent. Was Miss Kilman going to say anything more?

"Don't quite forget me," said Doris Kilman; her voice quivered. Right away to the end of the field the dumb creature galloped in terror.

The great hand opened and shut.

Elizabeth turned her head. The waitress came. One had to pay at the desk, Elizabeth said, and went off, drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room, and then, with a final twist, bowing her head very politely, she went.

She had gone. Miss Kilman sat at the marble table among the *éclairs*, stricken once, twice, thrice by shocks of suffering. She had gone. Mrs. Dalloway had triumphed. Elizabeth had gone. Beauty had gone, youth had gone.

So she sat. She got up, blundered off among the little tables, rocking slightly from side to side, and somebody came after her with her petticoat, and she lost her way, and was hemmed in by trunks specially prepared for taking to India; next got among the accouchement⁴ sets, and baby linen; through all the commodities of the world, perishable and permanent, hams, drugs, flowers, stationery, variously smelling, now sweet, now sour she lurched; saw herself thus lurching with her hat askew, very red in the face, full length in a looking-glass; and at last came out into the street.

The tower of Westminster Cathedral⁵ rose in front of her, the habitation of God. In the midst of the traffic, there was the habitation of God. Doggedly she set off with her parcel to that other sanctuary, the Abbey,⁶ where, raising her hands in a tent before her face, she sat beside those driven into shelter too; the variously assorted worshippers, now divested of social rank, almost of sex, as they raised their hands before their faces; but once they removed them, instantly reverent, middle class, English men and women, some of them desirous of seeing the wax works.⁷

But Miss Kilman held her tent before her face. Now she was deserted; now rejoined. New worshippers came in from the street to replace the strollers, and still, as people gazed round and shuffled

past the tomb of the Unknown Warrior,⁸ still she barred her eyes with her fingers and tried in this double darkness, for the light in the Abbey was bodiless, to aspire above the vanities, the desires, the commodities, to rid herself both of hatred and of love. Her hands twitched. She seemed to struggle. Yet to others God was accessible and the path to Him smooth. Mr. Fletcher, retired, of the Treasury, Mrs. Gorham, widow of the famous K.C.,⁹ approached Him simply, and having done their praying, leant back, enjoyed the music (the organ pealed sweetly), and saw Miss Kilman at the end of the row, praying, praying, and, being still on the threshold of their underworld, thought of her sympathetically as a soul haunting the same territory, a soul cut out of immaterial substance; not a woman, a soul.

But Mr. Fletcher had to go. He had to pass her, and being himself neat as a new pin, could not help being a little distressed by the poor lady's disorder; her hair down; her parcel on the floor. She did not at once let him pass. But, as he stood gazing about him, at the white marbles, grey window panes, and accumulated treasures (for he was extremely proud of the Abbey), her largeness, robustness, and power as she sat there shifting her knees from time to time (it was so rough the approach to her God—so tough her desires) impressed him, as they had impressed Mrs. Dalloway (she could not get the thought of her out of her mind that afternoon), the Rev. Edward Whittaker, and Elizabeth too.

And Elizabeth waited in Victoria Street for an omnibus. It was so nice to be out of doors. She thought perhaps she need not go home just yet. It was so nice to be out in the air. So she would get on to an omnibus. And already, even as she stood there, in her very well cut clothes, it was beginning. . . . People were beginning to compare her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies, and it made her life a burden to her, for she so much preferred being left alone to do what she liked in the country, but they would compare her to lilies, and she had to go to parties, and London was so dreary compared with being alone in the country with her father and the dogs.

Buses swooped, settled, were off—garish caravans, glistening with red and yellow varnish. But which should she get on to? She had no preferences. Of course, she would not push her way. She inclined to be passive. It was expression she needed, but her eyes were fine, Chinese, oriental, and, as her mother said, with such nice shoulders and holding herself so straight, she was always charming to look at; and lately, in the evening especially, when she was interested, for she never seemed excited, she looked almost beautiful, very stately, very serene. What could she be thinking? Every man fell in love with her, and she was really awfully bored. For it was beginning. Her mother could see that—the compliments were beginning. That she did not care more about it—for instance for her clothes—sometimes worried Clarissa, but perhaps it was as well with all those puppies and guinea pigs about having distemper, and it gave her a charm. And now there was this odd friendship with Miss Kilman. Well, thought Clarissa about three o'clock in the morning, reading Baron Marbot for she could not sleep, it proves she has a heart.

Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on top. The impetuous creature—a pirate—started forward, sprang away; she had to hold the rail to steady herself, for a pirate it was, reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously, boldly snatching a passenger, or ignoring a passenger, squeezing eel-like and arrogant in between, and then rushing insolently all sails spread up Whitehall. And did Elizabeth give one thought to poor Miss Kilman who loved her without jealousy, to whom she had been a fawn in the open, a moon in a glade? She was delighted to be free. The fresh air was so delicious. It had been so stuffy in the Army and Navy Stores. And now it was like riding, to be rushing up Whitehall; and to each movement of the omnibus the beautiful body in the fawn-coloured coat responded freely like a rider, like the figurehead of a ship, for the breeze slightly disarrayed her; the heat gave her cheeks the pallor of white painted wood; and

her fine eyes, having no eyes to meet, gazed ahead, blank, bright, with the staring incredible innocence of sculpture.

It was always talking about her own sufferings that made Miss Kilman so difficult. And was she right? If it was being on committees and giving up hours and hours every day (she hardly ever saw him in London) that helped the poor, her father did that, goodness knows,—if that was what Miss Kilman meant about being a Christian; but it was so difficult to say. Oh, she would like to go a little further. Another penny was it to the Strand? Here was another penny then. She would go up the Strand.

She liked people who were ill. And every profession is open to the women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. So she might be a doctor. She might be a farmer. Animals are often ill. She might own a thousand acres and have people under her. She would go and see them in their cottages. This was Somerset House.¹ One might be a very good farmer—and that, strangely enough though Miss Kilman had her share in it, was almost entirely due to Somerset House. It looked so splendid, so serious, that great grey building. And she liked the feeling of people working. She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. It was quite different here from Westminster, she thought, getting off at Chancery Lane.² It was so serious; it was so busy. In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into Parliament, if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand.

The feet of those people busy about their activities, hands putting stone to stone, minds eternally occupied not with trivial chatterings (comparing women to poplars—which was rather exciting, of course, but very silly), but with thoughts of ships, of business, of law, of administration, and with it all so stately (she was in the Temple), gay (there was the river), pious (there was the Church³), made her quite determined, whatever her mother might say, to become either a farmer or a doctor. But she was, of course, rather lazy.

And it was much better to say nothing about it. It seemed so silly. It was the sort of thing that did sometimes happen, when one was alone—buildings without architects' names, crowds of people coming back from the city having more power than single clergymen in Kensington, than any of the books Miss Kilman had lent her, to stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy, and shy on the mind's sandy floor to break surface, as a child suddenly stretches its arms; it was just that, perhaps, a sigh, a stretch of the arms, an impulse, a revelation, which has its effects for ever, and then down again it went to the sandy floor. She must go home. She must dress for dinner. But what was the time?—where was a clock?

She looked up Fleet Street.⁴ She walked just a little way towards St. Paul's, shyly, like some one penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting bye-streets, any more than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder.⁵ For no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting.

In many ways, her mother felt, she was extremely immature, like a child still, attached to dolls, to old slippers; a perfect baby; and that was charming. But then, of course, there was in the Dalloway family the tradition of public service. Abbesses, principals, head mistresses, dignitaries, in the republic of women—without being brilliant, any of them, they were that. She penetrated a little further in the direction of St. Paul's. She liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good. The noise was tremendous; and suddenly there were trumpets (the unemployed) blaring, rattling about in the uproar, military music; as if people were marching; yet had they been dying—had some woman breathed her last and whoever was watching, opening the window of the room where she had just brought off that act of supreme dignity, looked down on Fleet Street, that uproar, that

military music would have come triumphing up to him, consolatory, indifferent.

It was not conscious. There was no recognition in it of one's fortune, or fate, and for that very reason even to those dazed with watching for the last shivers of consciousness on the faces of the dying, consoling. Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in the rough stream of a glacier the ice holds a splinter of bone, a blue petal, some oak trees, and rolls them on.

But it was later than she thought. Her mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this. She turned back down the Strand.

A puff of wind (in spite of the heat, there was quite a wind) blew a thin black veil over the sun and over the Strand. The faces faded; the omnibuses suddenly lost their glow. For although the clouds were of mountainous white so that one could fancy hacking hard chips off with a hatchet, with broad golden slopes, lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them. Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already, now a summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station inalterably advanced into the midst or gravely led the procession to fresh anchorage. Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness.

Calmly and competently, Elizabeth Dalloway mounted the Westminster omnibus.

Going and coming, beckoning, signalling, so the light and shadow which now made the wall grey, now the bananas bright yellow, now made the Strand grey, now made the omnibuses bright yellow, seemed to Septimus Warren Smith lying on the sofa in the sitting-room; watching the watery gold glow and fade with the astonishing sensibility of some live creature on the roses, on the wall-paper. Outside the trees dragged their leaves like nets through the depths of the air; the sound of water was in the room and through the waves came the voices of birds singing. Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away. Fear no more, says the heart in the body; fear no more.

He was not afraid. At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall—there, there, there—her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning.

Rezia, sitting at the table twisting a hat in her hands, watched him; saw him smiling. He was happy then. But she could not bear to see him smiling. It was not marriage; it was not being one's husband to look strange like that, always to be starting, laughing, sitting hour after hour silent, or clutching her and telling her to write. The table drawer was full of those writings; about war, about Shakespeare; about great discoveries; how there is no death. Lately he had become excited suddenly for no reason (and both Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw said excitement was the worst thing for him), and waved his hands and cried out that he knew the truth! He knew everything! That man, his friend who was killed, Evans, had come, he said. He was singing behind the screen. She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing his

mind; wanting to add something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up.

But she heard nothing.

And once they found the girl who did the room reading one of these papers in fits of laughter. It was a dreadful pity. For that made Septimus cry out about human cruelty—how they tear each other to pieces. The fallen, he said, they tear to pieces. “Holmes is on us,” he would say, and he would invent stories about Holmes; Holmes eating porridge; Holmes reading Shakespeare—making himself roar with laughter or rage, for Dr. Holmes seemed to stand for something horrible to him. “Human nature,” he called him. Then there were the visions. He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea. Or he was hearing music. Really it was only a barrel organ or some man crying in the street. But “Lovely!” he used to cry, and the tears would run down his cheeks, which was to her the most dreadful thing of all, to see a man like Septimus, who had fought, who was brave, crying. And he would lie listening until suddenly he would cry that he was falling down, down into the flames! Actually she would look for flames, it was so vivid. But there was nothing. They were alone in the room. It was a dream, she would tell him and so quiet him at last, but sometimes she was frightened too. She sighed as she sat sewing.

Her sigh was tender and enchanting, like the wind outside a wood in the evening. Now she put down her scissors; now she turned to take something from the table. A little stir, a little crinkling, a little tapping built up something on the table there, where she sat sewing. Through his eyelashes he could see her blurred outline; her little black body; her face and hands; her turning movements at the table, as she took up a reel, or looked (she was apt to lose things) for her silk. She was making a hat for Mrs. Filmer’s married daughter, whose name was—he had forgotten her name.

“What is the name of Mrs. Filmer’s married daughter?” he asked.

“Mrs. Peters,” said Rezia. She was afraid it was too small, she said, holding it before her. Mrs. Peters was a big woman; but she did

not like her. It was only because Mrs. Filmer had been so good to them. "She gave me grapes this morning," she said—that Rezia wanted to do something to show that they were grateful. She had come into the room the other evening and found Mrs. Peters, who thought they were out, playing the gramophone.

"Was it true?" he asked. She was playing the gramophone? Yes; she had told him about it at the time; she had found Mrs. Peters playing the gramophone.

He began, very cautiously, to open his eyes, to see whether a gramophone was really there. But real things—real things were too exciting. He must be cautious. He would not go mad. First he looked at the fashion papers on the lower shelf, then, gradually at the gramophone with the green trumpet. Nothing could be more exact. And so, gathering courage, he looked at the sideboard; the plate of bananas; the engraving of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort;⁶ at the mantelpiece, with the jar of roses. None of these things moved. All were still; all were real.

"She is a woman with a spiteful tongue," said Rezia.

"What does Mr. Peters do?" Septimus asked.

"Ah," said Rezia, trying to remember. She thought Mrs. Filmer had said that he travelled for some company. "Just now he is in Hull,"⁷ she said.

"Just now!" She said that with her Italian accent. She said that herself. He shaded his eyes so that he might see only a little of her face at a time, first the chin, then the nose, then the forehead, in case it were deformed, or had some terrible mark on it. But no, there she was, perfectly natural, sewing, with the pursed lips that women have, the set, the melancholy expression, when sewing. But there was nothing terrible about it, he assured himself, looking a second time, a third time at her face, her hands, for what was frightening or disgusting in her as she sat there in broad daylight, sewing? Mrs. Peters had a spiteful tongue. Mr. Peters was in Hull. Why then rage and prophesy? Why fly scourged and outcast? Why be made to tremble and sob by the clouds? Why seek truths and deliver messages when Rezia sat sticking pins into the front of her

dress, and Mr. Peters was in Hull? Miracles, revelations, agonies, loneliness, falling through the sea, down, down into the flames, all were burnt out, for he had a sense, as he watched Rezia trimming the straw hat for Mrs. Peters, of a coverlet of flowers.

"It's too small for Mrs. Peters," said Septimus.

For the first time for days he was speaking as he used to do! Of course it was—absurdly small, she said. But Mrs. Peters had chosen it.

He took it out of her hands. He said it was an organ grinder's monkey's hat.

How it rejoiced her that! Not for weeks had they laughed like this together, poking fun privately like married people. What she meant was that if Mrs. Filmer had come in, or Mrs. Peters or anybody they would not have understood what she and Septimus were laughing at.

"There," she said, pinning a rose to one side of the hat. Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!

But that was still more ridiculous, Septimus said. Now the poor woman looked like a pig at a fair. (Nobody ever made her laugh as Septimus did.)

What had she got in her work-box? She had ribbons and beads, tassels, artificial flowers. She tumbled them out on the table. He began putting odd colours together—for though he had no fingers, could not even do up a parcel, he had a wonderful eye, and often he was right, sometimes absurd, of course, but sometimes wonderfully right.

"She shall have a beautiful hat!" he murmured, taking up this and that, Rezia kneeling by his side, looking over his shoulder. Now it was finished—that is to say the design; she must stitch it together. But she must be very, very careful, he said, to keep it just as he had made it.

So she sewed. When she sewed, he thought, she made a sound like a kettle on the hob;⁸ bubbling, murmuring, always busy, her strong little pointed fingers pinching and poking; her needle flashing straight. The sun might go in and out, on the tassels, on the

wallpaper, but he would wait, he thought, stretching out his feet, looking at his ringed sock at the end of the sofa; he would wait in this warm place, this pocket of still air, which one comes on at the edge of a wood sometimes in the evening, when, because of a fall in the ground, or some arrangement of the trees (one must be scientific above all, scientific), warmth lingers, and the air buffets the cheek like the wing of a bird.

"There it is," said Rezia, twirling Mrs. Peters' hat on the tips of her fingers. "That'll do for the moment. Later . . ." her sentence bubbled away drip, drip, drip, like a contented tap left running.

It was wonderful. Never had he done anything which made him feel so proud. It was so real, it was so substantial, Mrs. Peters' hat.

"Just look at it," he said.

Yes, it would always make her happy to see that hat. He had become himself then, he had laughed then. They had been alone together. Always she would like that hat.

He told her to try it on.

"But I must look so queer!" she cried, running over to the glass and looking first this side then that. Then she snatched it off again, for there was a tap at the door. Could it be Sir William Bradshaw? Had he sent already?

No! it was only the small girl with the evening paper.

What always happened, then happened—what happened every night of their lives. The small girl sucked her thumb at the door; Rezia went down on her knees; Rezia cooed and kissed; Rezia got a bag of sweets out of the table drawer. For so it always happened. First one thing, then another. So she built it up, first one thing and then another. Dancing, skipping, round and round the room they went. He took the paper. Surrey was all out,⁹ he read. There was a heat wave. Rezia repeated: Surrey was all out. There was a heat wave, making it part of the game she was playing with Mrs. Filmer's grandchild, both of them laughing, chattering at the same time, at their game. He was very tired. He was very happy. He would sleep. He shut his eyes. But directly he saw nothing the sounds of the game became fainter and stranger and sounded like the cries of

people seeking and not finding, and passing further and further away. They had lost him!

He started up in terror. What did he see? The plate of bananas on the sideboard. Nobody was there (Rezia had taken the child to its mother. It was bedtime). That was it: to be alone forever. That was the doom pronounced in Milan when he came into the room and saw them cutting out buckram shapes with their scissors; to be alone forever.

He was alone with the sideboard and the bananas. He was alone, exposed on this bleak eminence, stretched out—but not on a hill-top; not on a crag; on Mrs. Filmer's sitting-room sofa. As for the visions, the faces, the voices of the dead, where were they? There was a screen in front of him, with black bulrushes and blue swallows. Where he had once seen mountains, where he had seen faces, where he had seen beauty, there was a screen.

"Evans!" he cried. There was no answer. A mouse had squeaked, or a curtain rustled. Those were the voices of the dead. The screen, the coal-scuttle, the sideboard remained to him. Let him then face the screen, the coal-scuttle and the sideboard . . . but Rezia burst into the room chattering.

Some letter had come. Everybody's plans were changed. Mrs. Filmer would not be able to go to Brighton¹ after all. There was no time to let Mrs. Williams know, and really Rezia thought it very, very annoying, when she caught sight of the hat and thought . . . perhaps . . . she . . . might just make a little. . . . Her voice died out in contented melody.

"Ah, damn!" she cried (it was a joke of theirs, her swearing), the needle had broken. Hat, child, Brighton, needle. She built it up; first one thing, then another, she built it up, sewing.

She wanted him to say whether by moving the rose she had improved the hat. She sat on the end of the sofa.

They were perfectly happy now, she said, suddenly, putting the hat down. For she could say anything to him now. She could say whatever came into her head. That was almost the first thing she had felt about him, that night in the café when he had come in with

his English friends. He had come in, rather shyly, looking round him, and his hat had fallen when he hung it up. That she could remember: She knew he was English, though not one of the large Englishmen her sister admired, for he was always thin; but he had a beautiful fresh colour; and with his big nose, his bright eyes, his way of sitting a little hunched made her think, she had often told him, of a young hawk, that first evening she saw him, when they were playing dominoes, and he had come in—of a young hawk; but with her he was always very gentle. She had never seen him wild or drunk, only suffering sometimes through this terrible war, but even so, when she came in, he would put it all away. Anything, anything in the whole world, any little bother with her work, anything that struck her to say she would tell him, and he understood at once. Her own family even were not the same. Being older than she was and being so clever—how serious he was, wanting her to read Shakespeare before she could even read a child's story in English!—being so much more experienced, he could help her. And she too could help him.

But this hat now. And then (it was getting late) Sir William Bradshaw.

She held her hands to her head, waiting for him to say did he like the hat or not, and as she sat there, waiting, looking down, he could feel her mind, like a bird, falling from branch to branch, and always alighting, quite rightly; he could follow her mind, as she sat there in one of those loose lax poses that came to her naturally and, if he should say anything, at once she smiled, like a bird alighting with all its claws firm upon the bough.

But he remembered Bradshaw said, "The people we are most fond of are not good for us when we are ill." Bradshaw said, he must be taught to rest. Bradshaw said they must be separated.

"Must," "must," why "must"? What power had Bradshaw over him? "What right has Bradshaw to say 'must' to me?" he demanded.

"It is because you talked of killing yourself," said Rezia.
(Mercifully, she could now say anything to Septimus.)

So he was in their power! Holmes and Bradshaw were on him! The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place! "Must" it could say! Where were his papers? the things he had written?

She brought him his papers, the things he had written, things she had written for him. She tumbled them out on to the sofa. They looked at them together. Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings—were they?—on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences—the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world. Burn them! he cried. Now for his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans, Evans—his messages from the dead; do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister. Universal love: the meaning of the world. Burn them! he cried.

But Rezia laid her hands on them. Some were very beautiful, she thought. She would tie them up (for she had no envelope) with a piece of silk.

Even if they took him, she said, she would go with him. They could not separate them against their wills, she said.

Shuffling the edges straight, she did up the papers, and tied the parcel almost without looking, sitting beside him, he thought, as if all her petals were about her. She was a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest. Staggering he saw her mount the appalling staircase, laden with Holmes and Bradshaw, men who never weighed less than eleven stone six, who sent their wives to Court, men who made ten thousand a year and talked of proportion; who different in their verdicts (for Holmes said one thing, Bradshaw another), yet judges they were; who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted. "Must" they said. Over them she triumphed.

"There!" she said. The papers were tied up. No one should get at them. She would put them away.

And, she said, nothing should separate them. She sat down beside him and called him by the name of that hawk or crow which being malicious and a great destroyer of crops was precisely like him. No one could separate them, she said.

Then she got up to go into the bedroom to pack their things, but hearing voices downstairs and thinking that Dr. Holmes had perhaps called, ran down to prevent him coming up.

Septimus could hear her talking to Holmes on the staircase.

"My dear lady, I have come as a friend," Holmes was saying.

"No. I will not allow you to see my husband," she said.

He could see her, like a little hen, with her wings spread barring his passage. But Holmes persevered.

"My dear lady, allow me . . ." Holmes said, putting her aside (Holmes was a powerfully built man).

Holmes was coming upstairs. Holmes would burst open the door. Holmes would say "In a funk, eh?" Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes; not Bradshaw. Getting up rather unsteadily, hopping indeed from foot to foot, he considered Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread knife with "Bread" carved on the handle. Ah, but one mustn't spoil that. The gas fire? But it was too late now. Holmes was coming. Razors he might have got, but Rezia, who always did that sort of thing, had packed them. There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury-lodging house window, the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw like that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings.

"The coward!" cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood. Dr. Holmes and Mrs. Filmer collided with each other. Mrs. Filmer flapped her apron and made her hide her eyes in the bedroom. There was a great deal of running up and down stairs. Dr. Holmes came in—white as a sheet, shaking all over, with a glass in his hand. She must be brave and drink something, he said (What was it? Something sweet), for her husband was horribly mangled, would not recover consciousness, she must not see him, must be spared as much as possible, would have the inquest to go through, poor young woman. Who could have foretold it? A sudden impulse, no one was in the least to blame (he told Mrs. Filmer). And why the devil he did it, Dr. Holmes could not conceive.

It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking—one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering; like Septimus himself. She was falling asleep. But the clock went on striking, four, five, six and Mrs. Filmer waving her apron (they wouldn't bring the body in here, would they?) seemed part of that garden; or a flag. She had once seen a flag slowly rippling out from a mast when she stayed with her aunt at Venice. Men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War. Of her memories, most were happy.

She put on her hat, and ran through cornfields—where could it have been?—on to some hill, somewhere near the sea, for there were ships, gulls, butterflies, they sat on a cliff. In London too, there they sat, and, half dreaming, came to her through the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on shore, strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb.

"He is dead," she said, smiling at the poor old woman who guarded her with her honest light-blue eyes fixed on the door. (They wouldn't bring him in here, would they?) But Mrs. Filmer pooh-

poohed. Oh no, oh no! They were carrying him away now. Ought she not to be told? Married people ought to be together, Mrs. Filmer thought. But they must do as the doctor said.

"Let her sleep," said Dr. Holmes, feeling her pulse. She saw the large outline of his body standing dark against the window. So that was Dr. Holmes.

One of the triumphs of civilisation, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of the triumphs of civilisation, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; some one hit on the head, struck down by disease, knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself. That was civilisation. It struck him coming back from the East—the efficiency, the organisation, the communal spirit of London. Every cart or carriage of its own accord drew aside to let the ambulance pass. Perhaps it was morbid; or was it not touching rather, the respect which they showed this ambulance with its victim inside—busy men hurrying home yet instantly bethinking them as it passed of some wife; or presumably how easily it might have been them there, stretched on a shelf with a doctor and a nurse. . . . Ah, but thinking became morbid, sentimental, directly one began conjuring up doctors, dead bodies; a little glow of pleasure, a sort of lust too over the visual impression warned one not to go on with that sort of thing any more—fatal to art, fatal to friendship. True. And yet, thought Peter Walsh, as the ambulance turned the corner though the light high bell could be heard down the next street and still farther as it crossed the Tottenham Court Road, chiming constantly, it is the privilege of loneliness; in privacy one may do as one chooses. One might weep if no one saw. It had been his undoing—this susceptibility—in Anglo-Indian society; not weeping at the right time, or laughing either. I have that in me, he thought standing by the pillar-box, which could now dissolve in tears. Why, Heaven knows. Beauty of some sort probably, and the weight of the day, which beginning with that visit to Clarissa had exhausted him with its heat, its intensity, and the drip, drip, of one impression after another down

into that cellar where they stood, deep, dark, and no one would ever know. Partly for that reason, its secrecy, complete and inviolable, he had found life like an unknown garden, full of turns and corners, surprising, yes; really it took one's breath away, these moments; there coming to him by the pillar-box opposite the British Museum² one of them, a moment, in which things came together; this ambivalence; and life and death. It was as if he were sucked up to some very high roof by that rush of emotion and the rest of him, like a white shell-sprinkled beach, left bare. It had been his undoing in Anglo-Indian society—this susceptibility.

Clarissa once, going on top of an omnibus with him somewhere, Clarissa superficially at least, so easily moved, now in despair, now in the best of spirits, all aquiver in those days and such good company, spotting queer little scenes, names, people from the top of a bus, for they used to explore London and bring back bags full of treasures from the Caledonian market³—Clarissa had a theory in those days—they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have. It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? You met every day, then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people. But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not "here, here, here"; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue.⁴ She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. Odd affinities she had with people she had never spoken to, some woman in the street, some man behind a counter—even trees, or barns. It ended in a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her to believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . perhaps—perhaps.

Looking back over that long friendship of almost thirty years her theory worked to this extent. Brief, broken, often painful as their actual meetings had been what with his absences and interruptions (this morning, for instance, in came Elizabeth, like a long-legged colt, handsome, dumb, just as he was beginning to talk to Clarissa) the effect of them on his life was immeasurable. There was a mystery about it. You were given a sharp, acute, uncomfortable grain—the actual meeting; horribly painful as often as not; yet in absence, in the most unlikely places, it would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding, after years of lying lost. Thus she had come to him; on board ship; in the Himalayas; suggested by the oddest things (so Sally Seton, generous, enthusiastic goose! thought of *him* when she saw blue hydrangeas). She had influenced him more than any person he had ever known. And always in this way coming before him without his wishing it, cool, lady-like, critical; or ravishing, romantic, recalling some field or English harvest. He saw her most often in the country, not in London. One scene after another at Bourton. . . .

He had reached his hotel. He crossed the hall, with its mounds of reddish chairs and sofas, its spike-leaved, withered-looking plants. He got his key off the hook. The young lady handed him some letters. He went upstairs—he saw her most often at Bourton, in the late summer, when he stayed there for a week, or fortnight even, as people did in those days. First on top of some hill there she would stand, hands clapped to her hair, her cloak blowing out, pointing, crying to them—she saw the Severn⁵ beneath. Or in a wood, making the kettle boil—very ineffective with her fingers; the smoke curtseying, blowing in their faces; her little pink face showing through; begging water from an old woman in a cottage, who came to the door to watch them go. They walked always; the others drove. She was bored driving, disliked all animals, except that dog. They tramped miles along roads. She would break off to get her bearings, pilot him back across country; and all the time they argued, discussed poetry, discussed people, discussed politics (she

was a Radical then); never noticing a thing except when she stopped, cried out at a view or a tree, and made him look with her; and so on again, through stubble fields, she walking ahead, with a flower for her aunt, never tired of walking for all her delicacy; to drop down on Bourton in the dusk. Then, after dinner, old Breitkopf would open the piano and sing without any voice, and they would lie sunk in arm-chairs, trying not to laugh, but always breaking down and laughing, laughing—laughing at nothing. Breitkopf was supposed not to see. And then in the morning, flirting up and down like a wagtail⁶ in front of the house. . . .

Oh it was a letter from her! This blue envelope; that was her hand. And he would have to read it. Here was another of those meetings, bound to be painful! To read her letter needed the devil of an effort. "How heavenly it was to see him. She must tell him that." That was all.

But it upset him. It annoyed him. He wished she hadn't written it. Coming on top of his thoughts, it was like a nudge in the ribs. Why couldn't she let him be? After all, she had married Dalloway, and lived with him in perfect happiness all these years.

These hotels are not consoling places. Far from it. Any number of people had hung up their hats on those pegs. Even the flies, if you thought of it, had settled on other people's noses. As for the cleanliness which hit him in the face, it wasn't cleanliness, so much as bareness, frigidity; a thing that had to be. Some arid matron made her rounds at dawn sniffing, peering, causing blue-nosed⁷ maids to scour, for all the world as if the next visitor were a joint of meat to be served on a perfectly clean platter. For sleep, one bed; for sitting in, one arm-chair; for cleaning one's teeth and shaving one's chin, one tumbler, one looking-glass. Books, letters, dressing-gown, slipped about on the impersonality of the horsehair like incongruous impertinences. And it was Clarissa's letter that made him see all this. "Heavenly to see you. She must say so!" He folded the paper; pushed it away; nothing would induce him to read it again!

To get that letter⁸ to him by six o'clock she must have sat down and written it directly he left her; stamped it; sent somebody to the post. It was, as people say, very like her. She was upset by his visit. She had felt a great deal; had for a moment, when she kissed his hand, regretted, envied him even, remembered possibly (for he saw her look it) something he had said—how they would change the world if she married him perhaps; whereas, it was this; it was middle age; it was mediocrity; then forced herself with her indomitable vitality to put all that aside, there being in her a thread of life which for toughness, endurance, power to overcome obstacles, and carry her triumphantly through he had never known the like of. Yes; but there would come a reaction directly he left the room. She would be frightfully sorry for him; she would think what in the world she could do to give him pleasure (short always of the one thing) and he could see her with the tears running down her cheeks going to her writing-table and dashing off that one line which he was to find greeting him. . . . "Heavenly to see you!" And she meant it.

Peter Walsh had now unlaced his boots.

But it would not have been a success, their marriage. The other thing, after all, came so much more naturally.

It was odd; it was true; lots of people felt it. Peter Walsh, who had done just respectably, filled the usual posts adequately, was liked, but thought a little cranky, gave himself airs—it was odd that *he* should have had, especially now that his hair was grey, a contented look; a look of having reserves. It was this that made him attractive to women who liked the sense that he was not altogether manly. There was something unusual about him, or something behind him. It might be that he was bookish—never came to see you without taking up the book on the table (he was now reading, with his bootlaces trailing on the floor); or that he was a gentleman, which showed itself in the way he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and in his manners of course to women. For it was very charming and quite ridiculous how easily some girl without a grain of sense could twist him round her finger. But at her own risk. That is to say, though he might be ever so easy, and indeed with his gaiety and

good-breeding fascinating to be with, it was only up to a point. She said something—no, no; he saw through that. He wouldn't stand that—no, no. Then he could shout and rock and hold his sides together over some joke with men. He was the best judge of cooking in India. He was a man. But not the sort of man one had to respect—which was a mercy; not like Major Simmons, for instance; not in the least like that, Daisy thought, when, in spite of her two small children, she used to compare them.

He pulled off his boots. He emptied his pockets. Out came with his pocket-knife a snapshot of Daisy on the verandah; Daisy all in white, with a fox-terrier on her knee; very charming, very dark; the best he had ever seen of her. It did come, after all so naturally; so much more naturally than Clarissa. No fuss. No bother. No finicking and fidgeting. All plain sailing. And the dark, adorably pretty girl on the verandah exclaimed (he could hear her). Of course, of course she would give him everything! she cried (she had no sense of discretion) everything he wanted! she cried, running to meet him, whoever might be looking. And she was only twenty-four. And she had two children. Well, well!

Well indeed he had got himself into a mess at his age. And it came over him when he woke in the night pretty forcibly. Suppose they did marry? For him it would be all very well, but what about her? Mrs. Burgess, a good sort and no chatterbox, in whom he had confided, thought this absence of his in England, ostensibly to see lawyers might serve to make Daisy reconsider, think what it meant. It was a question of her position, Mrs. Burgess said; the social barrier; giving up her children. She'd be a widow with a past one of these days, draggling about in the suburbs, or more likely, indiscriminate (you know, she said, what such women get like, with too much paint). But Peter Walsh pooh-poohed all that. He didn't mean to die yet. Anyhow she must settle for herself; judge for herself, he thought, padding about the room in his socks, smoothing out his dress-shirt, for he might go to Clarissa's party, or he might go to one of the Halls, or he might settle in and read an absorbing book written by a man he used to know at Oxford. And if he did retire,

that's what he'd do—write books. He would go to Oxford and poke about in the Bodleian.⁹ Vainly the dark, adorably pretty girl ran to the end of the terrace; vainly waved her hand; vainly cried she didn't care a straw what people said. There he was, the man she thought the world of, the perfect gentleman, the fascinating, the distinguished (and his age made not the least difference to her), padding about a room in an hotel in Bloomsbury, shaving, washing, continuing, as he took up cans, put down razors, to poke about in the Bodleian, and get at the truth about one or two little matters that interested him. And he would have a chat with whoever it might be, and so come to disregard more and more precise hours for lunch, and miss engagements, and when Daisy asked him, as she would, for a kiss, a scene, fail to come up to the scratch¹ (though he was genuinely devoted to her)—in short it might be happier, as Mrs. Burgess said, that she should forget him, or merely remember him as he was in August 1922, like a figure standing at the cross roads at dusk, which grows more and more remote as the dog-cart² spins away, carrying her securely fastened to the back seat, though her arms are outstretched, and as she sees the figure dwindle and disappear still she cries out how she would do anything in the world, anything, anything, anything. . . .

He never knew what people thought. It became more and more difficult for him to concentrate. He became absorbed; he became busied with his own concerns; now surly, now gay; dependent on women, absent-minded, moody, less and less able (so he thought as he shaved) to understand why Clarissa couldn't simply find them a lodging and be nice to Daisy; introduce her. And then he could just—just do what? just haunt and hover (he was at the moment actually engaged in sorting out various keys, papers), swoop and taste, be alone, in short, sufficient to himself; and yet nobody of course was more dependent upon others (he buttoned his waistcoat); it had been his undoing. He could not keep out of smoking-rooms, liked colonels, liked golf, liked bridge, and above all women's society, and the fineness of their companionship, and their faithfulness and audacity and greatness in loving which though it had its drawbacks

seemed to him (and the dark, adorably pretty face was on top of the envelopes) so wholly admirable, so splendid a flower to grow on the crest of human life, and yet he could not come up to the scratch, being always apt to see round things (Clarissa had sapped something in him permanently), and to tire very easily of mute devotion and to want variety in love, though it would make him furious if Daisy loved anybody else, furious! for he was jealous, uncontrollably jealous by temperament. He suffered tortures! But where was his knife; his watch; his seals, his notecase, and Clarissa's letter which he would not read again but liked to think of, and Daisy's photograph? And now for dinner.

They were eating.

Sitting at little tables round vases, dressed or not dressed, with their shawls and bags laid beside them, with their air of false composure, for they were not used to so many courses at dinner, and confidence, for they were able to pay for it, and strain, for they had been running about London all day shopping, sightseeing; and their natural curiosity, for they looked round and up as the nice-looking gentleman in horn-rimmed spectacles came in, and their good nature, for they would have been glad to do any little service, such as lend a time-table or impart useful information, and their desire, pulsing in them, tugging at them subterraneously, somehow to establish connections if it were only a birthplace (Liverpool,³ for example) in common or friends of the same name; with their furtive glances, odd silences, and sudden withdrawals into family jocularities and isolation; there they sat eating dinner when Mr. Walsh came in and took his seat at a little table by the curtain.

It was not that he said anything, for being solitary he could only address himself to the waiter; it was his way of looking at the menu, of pointing his forefinger to a particular wine, of hitching himself up to the table, of addressing himself seriously, not gluttonously to dinner, that won him their respect; which, having to remain unexpressed for the greater part of the meal, flared up at the table where the Morriszes sat when Mr. Walsh was heard to say at the end of the meal, "Bartlett pears." Why he should have spoken so

moderately yet firmly, with the air of a disciplinarian well within his rights which are founded upon justice, neither young Charles Morris, nor old Charles, neither Miss Elaine nor Mrs. Morris knew. But when he said, "Bartlett pears," sitting alone at his table, they felt that he counted on their support in some lawful demand; was champion of a cause which immediately became their own, so that their eyes met his eyes sympathetically, and when they all reached the smoking-room simultaneously, a little talk between them became inevitable.

It was not very profound—only to the effect that London was crowded; had changed in thirty years; that Mr. Morris preferred Liverpool; that Mrs. Morris had been to the Westminster flower-show, and that they had all seen the Prince of Wales. Yet, thought Peter Walsh, no family in the world can compare with the Morrises; none whatever; and their relations to each other are perfect, and they don't care a hang for the upper classes, and they like what they like, and Elaine is training for the family business, and the boy has won a scholarship at Leeds, and the old lady (who is about his own age) has three more children at home; and they have two motor cars, but Mr. Morris still mends the boots on Sunday: it is superb, it is absolutely superb, thought Peter Walsh, swaying a little backwards and forwards with his liqueur glass in his hand among the hairy red chairs and ashtrays, feeling very well pleased with himself, for the Morrises liked him. Yes, they liked a man who said, "Bartlett pears." They liked him, he felt.

He would go to Clarissa's party. (The Morrises moved off; but they would meet again.) He would go to Clarissa's party, because he wanted to ask Richard what they were doing in India—the conservative duffers.⁴ And what's being acted? And music. . . . Oh yes, and mere gossip.

For this is the truth about our soul, he thought, our self, who fish-like inhabits deep seas and plies among obscurities threading her way between the boles of giant weeds, over sun-flickered spaces and on and on into gloom, cold, deep, inscrutable; suddenly she shoots to the surface and sports on the wind-wrinkled waves; that is, has a positive need to brush, scrape, kindle herself, gossiping.

What did the Government mean—Richard Dalloway would know—to do about India?

Since it was a very hot night and the paper boys went by with placards proclaiming in huge red letters that there was a heat-wave, wicker chairs were placed on the hotel steps and there, sipping, smoking, detached gentlemen sat. Peter Walsh sat there. One might fancy that day, the London day, was just beginning. Like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue and pearls, the day changed, put off stuff, took gauze, changed to evening, and with the same sigh of exhilaration that a woman breathes, tumbling petticoats on the floor, it too shed dust, heat, colour; the traffic thinned; motor cars, tinkling, darting, succeeded the lumber of vans; and here and there among the thick foliage of the squares an intense light hung. I resign, the evening seemed to say, as it paled and faded above the battlements and prominences, moulded, pointed, of hotel, flat, and block of shops, I fade, she was beginning, I disappear, but London would have none of it, and rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in her revelry.

For the great revolution of Mr. Willett's summer time had taken place since Peter Walsh's last visit to England. The prolonged evening was new to him. It was inspiriting, rather. For as the young people went by with their despatch-boxes,⁵ awfully glad to be free, proud too, dumbly, of stepping this famous pavement, joy of a kind, cheap, tinselly, if you like, but all the same rapture, flushed their faces. They dressed well too; pink stockings; pretty shoes. They would now have two hours at the pictures. It sharpened, it refined them, the yellow-blue evening light; and on the leaves in the square shone lurid, livid—they looked as if dipped in sea water—the foliage of a submerged city. He was astonished by the beauty; it was encouraging too, for where the returned Anglo-Indian sat by rights (he knew crowds of them) in the Oriental Club⁶ biliously summing up the ruin of the world, here was he, as young as ever; envying young people their summer time⁷ and the rest of it, and more than suspecting from the words of a girl, from a housemaid's laughter—

intangible things you couldn't lay your hands on—that shift in the whole pyramidal accumulation which in his youth had seemed immovable. On top of them it had pressed; weighed them down, the women especially, like those flowers Clarissa's Aunt Helena used to press between sheets of grey blotting-paper with Littré's dictionary⁸ on top, sitting under the lamp after dinner. She was dead now. He had heard of her, from Clarissa, losing the sight of one eye. It seemed so fitting—one of nature's masterpieces—that old Miss Parry should turn to glass. She would die like some bird in a frost gripping her perch. She belonged to a different age, but being so entire, so complete, would always stand up on the horizon, stone-white, eminent, like a lighthouse marking some past stage on this adventurous, long, long voyage, this interminable (he felt for a copper⁹ to buy a paper and read about Surrey and Yorkshire—he had held out that copper millions of times. Surrey was all out once more)—this interminable life. But cricket was no mere game. Cricket was important. He could never help reading about cricket. He read the scores in the stop press first, then how it was a hot day; then about a murder case. Having done things millions of times enriched them, though it might be said to take the surface off. The past enriched, and experience, and having cared for one or two people, and so having acquired the power which the young lack, of cutting short, doing what one likes, not caring a rap what people say and coming and going without any very great expectations (he left his paper on the table and moved off), which however (and he looked for his hat and coat) was not altogether true of him, not to-night, for here he was starting to go to a party, at his age, with the belief upon him that he was about to have an experience. But what?

Beauty anyhow. Not the crude beauty of the eye. It was not beauty pure and simple—Bedford Place leading into Russell Square.¹ It was straightness and emptiness of course; the symmetry of a corridor; but it was also windows lit up, a piano, a gramophone sounding; a sense of pleasure-making hidden, but now and again emerging when, through the uncurtained window, the window left open, one saw parties sitting over tables, young people slowly

circling, conversations between men and women, maids idly looking out (a strange comment theirs, when work was done), stockings drying on top ledges, a parrot, a few plants. Absorbing, mysterious, of infinite richness, this life. And in the large square where the cabs shot and swerved so quick, there were loitering couples, dallying, embracing, shrunk up under the shower of a tree; that was moving; so silent, so absorbed, that one passed, discreetly, timidly, as if in the presence of some sacred ceremony to interrupt which would have been impious. That was interesting. And so on into the flare and glare.

His light overcoat blew open, he stepped with indescribable idiosyncrasy, leant a little forward, tripped, with his hands behind his back and his eyes still a little hawklike; he tripped through London, towards Westminster, observing.

Was everybody dining out, then? Doors were being opened here by a footman to let issue a high-stepping old dame, in buckled shoes, with three purple ostrich feathers in her hair. Doors were being opened for ladies wrapped like mummies in shawls with bright flowers on them, ladies with bare heads. And in respectable quarters with stucco pillars through small front gardens lightly swathed with combs in their hair (having run up to see the children), women came; men waited for them, with their coats blowing open, and the motor started. Everybody was going out. What with these doors being opened, and the descent and the start, it seemed as if the whole of London were embarking in little boats moored to the bank, tossing on the waters, as if the whole place were floating off in carnival. And Whitehall was skated over, silver beaten as it was, skated over by spiders, and there was a sense of midges² round the arc lamps; it was so hot that people stood about talking. And here in Westminster was a retired Judge, presumably, sitting four square at his house door dressed all in white. An Anglo-Indian presumably.

And here a shindy³ of brawling women, drunken women; here only a policeman and looming houses, high houses, domed houses, churches, parliaments, and the hoot of a steamer on the river, a hollow misty cry. But it was her street, this, Clarissa's; cabs were

rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn together, it seemed to him because they bore people going to her party, Clarissa's party.

The cold stream of visual impressions failed him now as if the eye were a cup that overflowed and let the rest run down its china walls unrecorded. The brain must wake now. The body must contract now, entering the house, the lighted house, where the door stood open, where the motor cars were standing, and bright women descending: the soul must brave itself to endure. He opened the big blade of his pocket-knife.

Lucy came running full tilt downstairs, having just nipped in to the drawing-room to smooth a cover, to straighten a chair, to pause a moment and feel whoever came in must think how clean, how bright, how beautifully cared for, when they saw the beautiful silver, the brass fire-irons, the new chair-covers, and the curtains of yellow chintz: she appraised each; heard a roar of voices; people already coming up from dinner; she must fly!

The Prime Minister⁴ was coming, Agnes said: so she had heard them say in the dining-room, she said, coming in with a tray of glasses. Did it matter, did it matter in the least, one Prime Minister more or less? It made no difference at this hour of the night to Mrs. Walker among the plates, saucepans, cullenders, frying-pans, chicken in aspic,⁵ ice-cream freezers, pared crusts of bread, lemons, soup tureens, and pudding basins which, however hard they washed up in the scullery seemed to be all on top of her, on the kitchen table, on chairs, while the fire blared and roared, the electric lights glared, and still supper had to be laid. All she felt was, one Prime Minister more or less made not a scrap of difference to Mrs. Walker.

The ladies were going upstairs already, said Lucy; the ladies were going up, one by one, Mrs. Dalloway walking last and almost always sending back some message to the kitchen, "My love to Mrs. Walker," that was it one night. Next morning they would go over the dishes—the soup, the salmon; the salmon, Mrs. Walker knew, as usual underdone, for she always got nervous about the pudding and

left it to Jenny; so it happened, the salmon was always underdone. But some lady with fair hair and silver ornaments had said, Lucy said, about the entrée, was it really made at home? But it was the salmon that bothered Mrs. Walker, as she spun the plates round and round, and pulled in dampers and pulled out dampers;⁶ and there came a burst of laughter from the dining-room; a voice speaking; then another burst of laughter—the gentlemen enjoying themselves when the ladies had gone. The tokay, said Lucy running in. Mr. Dalloway had sent for the tokay, from the Emperor's cellars, the Imperial Tokay.⁷

It was borne through the kitchen. Over her shoulder Lucy reported how Miss Elizabeth looked quite lovely; she couldn't take her eyes off her; in her pink dress, wearing the necklace Mr. Dalloway had given her. Jenny must remember the dog, Miss Elizabeth's fox-terrier, which, since it bit, had to be shut up and might, Elizabeth thought, want something. Jenny must remember the dog. But Jenny was not going upstairs with all those people about. There was a motor at the door already! There was a ring at the bell—and the gentlemen still in the dining-room, drinking tokay!

There, they were going upstairs; that was the first to come, and now they would come faster and faster, so that Mrs. Parkinson (hired for parties) would leave the hall door ajar, and the hall would be full of gentlemen waiting (they stood waiting, sleeking down their hair) while the ladies took their cloaks off in the room along the passage; where Mrs. Barnet helped them, old Ellen Barnet, who had been with the family for forty years, and came every summer to help the ladies, and remembered mothers when they were girls, and though very unassuming did shake hands; said "milady" very respectfully, yet had a humorous way with her, looking at the young ladies, and ever so tactfully helping Lady Lovejoy, who had some trouble with her underbodice. And they could not help feeling, Lady Lovejoy and Miss Alice, that some little privilege in the matter of brush and comb, was awarded them having known Mrs. Barnet—"thirty years, milady," Mrs. Barnet supplied her. Young ladies did not use to rouge, said Lady Lovejoy, when they stayed at Bourton in the old days. And Miss

Alice didn't need rouge, said Mrs. Barnet, looking at her fondly. There Mrs. Barnet would sit, in the cloakroom, patting down the furs, smoothing out the Spanish shawls, tidying the dressing-table, and knowing perfectly well, in spite of the furs and the embroideries, which were nice ladies, which were not. The dear old body, said Lady Lovejoy, mounting the stairs, Clarissa's old nurse.

And then Lady Lovejoy stiffened. "Lady and Miss Lovejoy," she said to Mr. Wilkins (hired for parties). He had an admirable manner, as he bent and straightened himself, bent and straightened himself and announced with perfect impartiality "Lady and Miss Lovejoy . . . Sir John and Lady Needham . . . Miss Weld . . . Mr. Walsh." His manner was admirable; his family life must be irreproachable, except that it seemed impossible that a being with greenish lips and shaven cheeks could ever have blundered into the nuisance of children.

"How delightful to see you!" said Clarissa. She said it to every one. How delightful to see you! She was at her worst—effusive, insincere. It was a great mistake to have come. He should have stayed at home and read his book, thought Peter Walsh; should have gone to a music hall; he should have stayed at home, for he knew no one.

Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure, Clarissa felt it in her bones as dear old Lord Lexham stood there apologising for his wife who had caught cold at the Buckingham Palace garden party. She could see Peter out of the tail of her eye, criticising her, there, in that corner. Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away like some Ellie Henderson! It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then, merely to criticise? Why always take, never give? Why not risk one's one little point of view? There he was wandering off, and she must speak to him. But she would not get the chance. Life was that—humiliation, renunciation. What Lord Lexham was saying was that

his wife would not wear her furs at the garden party because "my dear, you ladies are all alike"—Lady Lexham being seventy-five at least! It was delicious, how they petted each other, that old couple. She did like old Lord Lexham. She did think it mattered, her party, and it made her feel quite sick to know that it was all going wrong, all falling flat. Anything, any explosion, any horror was better than people wandering aimlessly, standing in a bunch at a corner like Ellie Henderson, not even caring to hold themselves upright.

Gently the yellow curtain with all the birds of Paradise⁸ blew out and it seemed as if there were a flight of wings into the room, right out, then sucked back. (For the windows were open.) Was it draughty, Ellie Henderson wondered? She was subject to chills. But it did not matter that she should come down sneezing tomorrow; it was the girls with their naked shoulders she thought of, being trained to think of others by an old father, an invalid, late vicar of Bourton, but he was dead now; and her chills never went to her chest, never. It was the girls she thought of, the young girls with their bare shoulders, she herself having always been a wisp of a creature, with her thin hair and meagre profile; though now, past fifty, there was beginning to shine through some mild beam, something purified into distinction by years of self-abnegation but obscured again, perpetually, by her distressing gentility, her panic fear, which arose from three hundred pounds' income, and her weaponless state (she could not earn a penny) and it made her timid, and more and more disqualified year by year to meet well-dressed people who did this sort of thing every night of the season, merely telling their maids "I'll wear so and so," whereas Ellie Henderson ran out nervously and bought cheap pink flowers, half a dozen, and then threw a shawl over her old black dress. For her invitation to Clarissa's party had come at the last moment. She was not quite happy about it. She had a sort of feeling that Clarissa had not meant to ask her this year.

Why should she? There was no reason really, except that they had always known each other. Indeed, they were cousins. But naturally they had rather drifted apart, Clarissa being so sought

after. It was an event to her, going to a party. It was quite a treat just to see the lovely clothes. Wasn't that Elizabeth, grown up, with her hair done in the fashionable way, in the pink dress? Yet she could not be more than seventeen. She was very, very handsome. But girls when they first came out didn't seem to wear white as they used. (She must remember everything to tell Edith.) Girls wore straight frocks, perfectly tight, with skirts well above the ankles. It was not becoming, she thought.

So, with her weak eyesight, Ellie Henderson craned rather forward, and it wasn't so much she who minded not having any one to talk to (she hardly knew anybody there), for she felt that they were all such interesting people to watch; politicians presumably; Richard Dalloway's friends; but it was Richard himself who felt that he could not let the poor creature go on standing there all the evening by herself.

"Well, Ellie, and how's the world treating *you*?" he said in his genial way, and Ellie Henderson, getting nervous and flushing and feeling that it was extraordinarily nice of him to come and talk to her, said that many people really felt the heat more than the cold.

"Yes, they do," said Richard Dalloway. "Yes."

But what more did one say?

"Hullo, Richard," said somebody, taking him by the elbow, and, good Lord, there was old Peter, old Peter Walsh. He was delighted to see him—ever so pleased to see him! He hadn't changed a bit. And off they went together walking right across the room, giving each other little pats, as if they hadn't met for a long time, Ellie Henderson thought, watching them go, certain she knew that man's face. A tall man, middle aged, rather fine eyes, dark, wearing spectacles, with a look of John Burrows. Edith would be sure to know.

The curtain with its flight of birds of Paradise blew out again. And Clarissa saw—she saw Ralph Lyon beat it back, and go on talking. So it wasn't a failure after all! it was going to be all right now—her party. It had begun. It had started. But it was still touch and go. She must stand there for the present. People seemed to come in a rush.

Colonel and Mrs. Garrod . . . Mr. Hugh Whitbread . . . Mr. Bowley . . . Mrs. Hilbery . . . Lady Mary Maddox . . . Mr. Quin . . . intoned Wilkin. She had six or seven words with each, and they went on, they went into the rooms; into something now, not nothing, since Ralph Lyon had beat back the curtain.

And yet for her own part, it was too much of an effort. She was not enjoying it. It was too much like being—just anybody, standing there; anybody could do it, yet this anybody she did a little admire, couldn't help feeling that she had, anyhow, made this happen, that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like, but felt herself a stake driven in at the top of her stairs. Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself, and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background, it was possible to say things you couldn't say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow.

"How delightful to see you!" she said. Dear old Sir Harry! He would know every one.

And what was so odd about it was the sense one had as they came up the stairs one after another, Mrs. Mount and Celia, Herbert Ainsty, Mrs. Dakers—oh and Lady Bruton!

"How awfully good of you to come!" she said, and she meant it—it was odd how standing there one felt them going on, going on, some quite old, some . . .

What name? Lady Rosseter? But who on earth was Lady Rosseter?

"Clarissa!" That voice! It was Sally Seton! Sally Seton! after all these years! She loomed through a mist. For she hadn't looked like *that*, Sally Seton, when Clarissa grasped the hot water can, to think of her under this roof, under this roof! Not like that!

All on top of each other, embarrassed, laughing, words tumbled out—passing through London; heard from Clara Haydon; what a

chance of seeing you! So I thrust myself in—without an invitation. . .

One might put down the hot water can quite composedly. The lustre had gone out of her. Yet it was extraordinary to see her again, older, happier, less lovely. They kissed each other, first this cheek then that, by the drawing-room door, and Clarissa turned, with Sally's hand in hers, and saw her rooms full, heard the roar of voices, saw the candlesticks, the blowing curtains, and the roses which Richard had given her.

"I have five enormous boys," said Sally.

She had the simplest egotism, the most open desire to be thought first always, and Clarissa loved her for being still like that. "I can't believe it!" she cried, kindling all over with pleasure at the thought of the past.

But alas, Wilkins; Wilkins wanted her; Wilkins was emitting in a voice of commanding authority as if the whole company must be admonished and the hostess reclaimed from frivolity, one name:

"The Prime Minister," said Peter Walsh.

The Prime Minister? Was it really? Ellie Henderson marvelled. What a thing to tell Edith!

One couldn't laugh at him. He looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits⁹—poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace. And to be fair, as he went his rounds, first with Clarissa then with Richard escorting him, he did it very well. He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society. Old Lady Bruton, and she looked very fine too, very stalwart in her lace, swam up, and they withdrew into a little room which at once became spied upon, guarded, and a sort of stir and rustle rippled through every one, openly: the Prime Minister!

Lord, lord, the snobbery of the English! thought Peter Walsh, standing in the corner. How they loved dressing up in gold lace and doing homage! There! That must be, by Jove it was, Hugh

Whitbread, snuffing round the precincts of the great, grown rather fatter, rather whiter, the admirable Hugh!

He looked always as if he were on duty, thought Peter, a privileged, but secretive being, hoarding secrets which he would die to defend, though it was only some little piece of tittle-tattle dropped by a court footman, which would be in all the papers to-morrow. Such were his rattles, his baubles, in playing with which he had grown white, come to the verge of old age, enjoying the respect and affection of all who had the privilege of knowing this type of the English public school man.¹ Inevitably one made up things like that about Hugh; that was his style; the style of those admirable letters which Peter had read thousands of miles across the sea in the *Times*, and had thanked God he was out of that pernicious hubble-bubble if it were only to hear baboons chatter and coolies beat their wives. An olive-skinned youth from one of the Universities stood obsequiously by. Him he would patronise, initiate, teach how to get on. For he liked nothing better than doing kindnesses, making the hearts of old ladies palpitate with the joy of being thought of in their age, their affliction, thinking themselves quite forgotten, yet here was dear Hugh driving up and spending an hour talking of the past, remembering trifles, praising the homemade cake, though Hugh might eat cake with a Duchess any day of his life, and, to look at him, probably did spend a good deal of time in that agreeable occupation. The All-judging, the All-merciful, might excuse. Peter Walsh had no mercy. Villains there must be, and God knows the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in a train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread and his kindness. Look at him now, on tiptoe, dancing forward, bowing and scraping, as the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton emerged, intimating for all the world to see that he was privileged to say something, something private, to Lady Bruton as she passed. She stopped. She wagged her fine old head. She was thanking him presumably for some piece of servility. She had her toadies, minor officials in Government offices who ran about putting through little jobs on her

behalf, in return for which she gave them luncheon. But she derived from the eighteenth century. She was all right.

And now Clarissa escorted her Prime Minister down the room, prancing, sparkling, with the stateliness of her grey hair. She wore ear-rings, and a silver-green mermaid's dress. Lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses she seemed, having that gift still; to be; to exist; to sum it all up in the moment as she passed; turned, caught her scarf in some other woman's dress, unhitched it, laughed, all with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element. But age had brushed her; even as a mermaid might behold in her glass the setting sun on some very clear evening over the waves. There was a breath of tenderness; her severity, her prudery, her woodenness were all warmed through now, and she had about her as she said goodbye to the thick gold-laced man who was doing his best, and good luck to him, to look important, an inexpressible dignity; an exquisite cordiality; as if she wished the whole world well, and must now, being on the very verge and rim of things, take her leave. So she made him think. (But he was not in love.)

Indeed, Clarissa felt, the Prime Minister had been good to come. And, walking down the room with him, with Sally there and Peter there and Richard very pleased, with all those people rather inclined, perhaps, to envy, she had felt that intoxication of the moment, that dilatation of the nerves of the heart itself till it seemed to quiver, steeped, upright;—yes, but after all it was what other people felt, that; for, though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting, still these semblances, these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart; and it might be that she was growing old but they satisfied her no longer as they used; and suddenly, as she saw the Prime Minister go down the stairs, the gilt rim of the Sir Joshua picture² of the little girl with a muff brought back Kilman with a rush; Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real. Ah, how she hated her—hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power; Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile

(Richard would say, What nonsense!). She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends—not Mrs. Durrant and Clara, Sir William and Lady Bradshaw, Miss Truelock and Eleanor Gibson (whom she saw coming upstairs). They must find her if they wanted her. She was for the party!

There was her old friend Sir Harry.

"Dear Sir Harry!" she said, going up to the fine old fellow who had produced more bad pictures than any other two Academicians in the whole of St. John's Wood³ (they were always of cattle, standing in sunset pools absorbing moisture, or signifying, for he had a certain range of gesture, by the raising of one foreleg and the toss of the antlers, "the Approach of the Stranger"—all his activities, dining out, racing, were founded on cattle standing absorbing moisture in sunset pools).

"What are you laughing at?" she asked him. For Willie Titcomb and Sir Harry and Herbert Ainsty were all laughing. But no. Sir Harry could not tell Clarissa Dalloway (much though he liked her; of her type he thought her perfect, and threatened to paint her) his stories of the music hall stage. He chaffed her about her party. He missed his brandy. These circles, he said, were above him. But he liked her; respected her, in spite of her damnable, difficult upper-class refinement, which made it impossible to ask Clarissa Dalloway to sit on his knee. And up came that wandering will-o'-the-wisp,⁴ that vagulous phosphorescence, old Mrs. Hilbery, stretching her hands to the blaze of his laughter (about the Duke and the Lady), which, as she heard it across the room, seemed to reassure her on a point which sometimes bothered her if she woke early in the morning and did not like to call her maid for a cup of tea; how it is certain we must die.

"They won't tell us their stories," said Clarissa.

"Dear Clarissa!" exclaimed Mrs. Hilbery. She looked tonight, she said, so like her mother as she first saw her walking in a garden in a grey hat.

And really Clarissa's eyes filled with tears. Her mother, walking in a garden! But alas, she must go.

For there was Professor Brierly, who lectured on Milton,⁵ talking to little Jim Hutton (who was unable even for a party like this to compass both tie and waistcoat or make his hair lie flat), and even at this distance they were quarrelling, she could see. For Professor Brierly was a very queer fish. With all those degrees, honours, lectureships between him and the scribblers he suspected instantly an atmosphere not favourable to his queer compound; his prodigious learning and timidity; his wintry charm without cordiality, his innocence blent with snobbery; he quivered if made conscious by a lady's unkempt hair, a youth's boots, of an underworld, very creditable doubtless, of rebels, of ardent young people; of would-be geniuses, and intimated with a little toss of the head, with a sniff—Humph!—the value of moderation; of some slight training in the classics in order to appreciate Milton. Professor Brierly (Clarissa could see) wasn't hitting it off with little Jim Hutton (who wore red socks, his black being at the laundry) about Milton. She interrupted.

She said she loved Bach.⁶ So did Hutton. That was the bond between them, and Hutton (a very bad poet) always felt that Mrs. Dalloway was far the best of the great ladies who took an interest in art. It was odd how strict she was. About music she was purely impersonal. She was rather a prig. But how charming to look at! She made her house so nice if it weren't for her Professors. Clarissa had half a mind to snatch him off and set him down at the piano in the back room. For he played divinely.

"But the noise!" she said. "The noise!"

"The sign of a successful party." Nodding urbanely, the Professor stepped delicately off.

"He knows everything in the whole world about Milton," said Clarissa.

"Does he indeed?" said Hutton, who would imitate the Professor throughout Hampstead;⁷ the Professor on Milton; the Professor on moderation; the Professor stepping delicately off.

But she must speak to that couple, said Clarissa, Lord Gayton and Nancy Blow.

Not that *they* added perceptibly to the noise of the party. They were not talking (perceptibly) as they stood side by side by the yellow curtains. They would soon be off elsewhere, together; and never had very much to say in any circumstances. They looked; that was all. That was enough. They looked so clean, so sound, she with an apricot bloom of powder and paint, but he scrubbed, rinsed, with the eyes of a bird, so that no ball could pass him or stroke surprise him. He struck, he leapt, accurately, on the spot. Ponies' mouths quivered at the end of his reins. He had his honours, ancestral monuments, banners hanging in the church at home. He had his duties; his tenants; a mother and sisters; had been all day at Lords, and that was what they were talking about—cricket, cousins, the movies—when Mrs. Dalloway came up. Lord Gayton liked her most awfully. So did Miss Blow. She had such charming manners.

"It is angelic—it is delicious of you to have come!" she said. She loved Lords; she loved youth, and Nancy, dressed at enormous expense by the greatest artists in Paris, stood there looking as if her body had merely put forth, of its own accord, a green frill.

"I had meant to have dancing," said Clarissa.

For the young people could not talk. And why should they? Shout, embrace, swing, be up at dawn; carry sugar to ponies; kiss and caress the snouts of adorable chows; and then all tingling and streaming, plunge and swim. But the enormous resources of the English language, the power it bestows, after all, of communicating feelings (at their age, she and Peter would have been arguing all the evening), was not for them. They would solidify young. They would be good beyond measure to the people on the estate, but alone, perhaps, rather dull.

"What a pity!" she said. "I had hoped to have dancing."

It was so extraordinarily nice of them to have come! But talk of dancing! The rooms were packed.

There was old Aunt Helena in her shawl. Alas, she must leave them—Lord Gayton and Nancy Blow. There was old Miss Parry, her aunt.

For Miss Helena Parry was not dead: Miss Parry was alive. She was past eighty. She ascended staircases slowly with a stick. She was placed in a chair (Richard had seen to it). People who had known Burma in the 'seventies were always led up to her. Where had Peter got to? They used to be such friends. For at the mention of India, or even Ceylon,⁸ her eyes (only one was glass) slowly deepened, became blue, beheld, not human beings—she had no tender memories, no proud illusions about Viceroy, Generals, Mutinies⁹—it was orchids she saw, and mountain passes and herself carried on the backs of coolies in the 'sixties over solitary peaks; or descending to uproot orchids (startling blossoms, never beheld before) which she painted in water-colour; an indomitable Englishwoman, fretful if disturbed by the War, say, which dropped a bomb at her very door, from her deep meditation over orchids and her own figure journeying in the 'sixties in India—but here was Peter.

"Come and talk to Aunt Helena about Burma," said Clarissa.

And yet he had not had a word with her all the evening!

"We will talk later," said Clarissa, leading him up to Aunt Helena, in her white shawl, with her stick.

"Peter Walsh," said Clarissa.

That meant nothing.

Clarissa had asked her. It was tiring; it was noisy; but Clarissa had asked her. So she had come. It was a pity that they lived in London—Richard and Clarissa. If only for Clarissa's health it would have been better to live in the country. But Clarissa had always been fond of society.

"He has been in Burma," said Clarissa.

Ah. She could not resist recalling what Charles Darwin had said about her little book on the orchids of Burma.

(Clarissa must speak to Lady Bruton.)

No doubt it was forgotten now, her book on the orchids of Burma, but it went into three editions before 1870, she told Peter. She remembered him now. He had been at Bourton (and he had left

her, Peter Walsh remembered, without a word in the drawing-room that night when Clarissa had asked him to come boating).

"Richard so much enjoyed his lunch party," said Clarissa to Lady Bruton.

"Richard was the greatest possible help," Lady Bruton replied. "He helped me to write a letter. And how are you?"

"Oh, perfectly well!" said Clarissa. (Lady Bruton detested illness in the wives of politicians.)

"And there's Peter Walsh!" said Lady Bruton (for she could never think of anything to say to Clarissa; though she liked her. She had lots of fine qualities; but they had nothing in common—she and Clarissa. It might have been better if Richard had married a woman with less charm, who would have helped him more in his work. He had lost his chance of the Cabinet). "There's Peter Walsh!" she said, shaking hands with that agreeable sinner, that very able fellow who should have made a name for himself but hadn't (always in difficulties with women), and, of course, old Miss Parry. Wonderful old lady!

Lady Bruton stood by Miss Parry's chair, a spectral grenadier, draped in black, inviting Peter Walsh to lunch; cordial; but without small talk, remembering nothing whatever about the flora or fauna of India. She had been there, of course; had stayed with three Viceroys; thought some of the Indian civilians uncommonly fine fellows; but what a tragedy it was—the state of India! The Prime Minister had just been telling her (old Miss Parry huddled up in her shawl, did not care what the Prime Minister had just been telling her), and Lady Bruton would like to have Peter Walsh's opinion, he being fresh from the centre, and she would get Sir Sampson to meet him, for really it prevented her from sleeping at night, the folly of it, the wickedness she might say, being a soldier's daughter. She was an old woman now, not good for much. But her house, her servants, her good friend Milly Brush—did he remember her?—were all there only asking to be used if—if they could be of help, in short. For she never spoke of England, but this isle of men, this dear, dear land,¹ was in her blood (without reading Shakespeare), and if ever a

woman could have worn the helmet and shot the arrow, could have led troops to attack, ruled with indomitable justice barbarian hordes and lain under a shield noseless in a church, or made a green grass mound on some primeval hillside, that woman was Millicent Bruton. Debarred by her sex and some truancy, too, of the logical faculty (she found it impossible to write a letter to the *Times*), she had the thought of Empire always at hand, and had acquired from her association with that armoured goddess² her ramrod bearing, her robustness of demeanour, so that one could not figure her even in death parted from the earth or roaming territories over which, in some spiritual shape, the Union Jack³ had ceased to fly. To be not English even among the dead—no, no! Impossible!

But was it Lady Bruton (whom she used to know)? Was it Peter Walsh grown grey? Lady Rosseter asked herself (who had been Sally Seton). It was old Miss Parry certainly—the old aunt who used to be so cross when she stayed at Bourton. Never should she forget running along the passage naked, and being sent for by Miss Parry! And Clarissa! oh Clarissa! Sally caught her by the arm.

Clarissa stopped beside them.

"But I can't stay," she said. "I shall come later. Wait," she said, looking at Peter and Sally. They must wait, she meant, until all these people had gone.

"I shall come back," she said, looking at her old friends, Sally and Peter, who were shaking hands, and Sally, remembering the past no doubt, was laughing.

But her voice was wrung of its old ravishing richness; her eyes not aglow as they used to be, when she smoked cigars, when she ran down the passage to fetch her sponge bag, without a stitch of clothing on her, and Ellen Atkins asked, What if the gentlemen had met her? But everybody forgave her. She stole a chicken from the larder because she was hungry in the night; she smoked cigars in her bedroom; she left a priceless book in the punt.⁴ But everybody adored her (except perhaps Papa). It was her warmth; her vitality—she would paint, she would write. Old women in the village never to this day forgot to ask after "your friend in the red cloak who seemed

so bright." She accused Hugh Whitbread, of all people (and there he was, her old friend Hugh, talking to the Portuguese Ambassador), of kissing her in the smoking-room to punish her for saying that women should have votes. Vulgar men did, she said. And Clarissa remembered having to persuade her not to denounce him at family prayers—which she was capable of doing with her daring, her recklessness, her melodramatic love of being the centre of everything and creating scenes, and it was bound, Clarissa used to think, to end in some awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom; instead of which she had married, quite unexpectedly, a bald man with a large buttonhole who owned, it was said, cotton mills at Manchester. And she had five boys!

She and Peter had settled down together. They were talking: it seemed so familiar—that they should be talking. They would discuss the past. With the two of them (more even than with Richard) she shared her past; the garden; the trees; old Joseph Breitkopf singing Brahms without any voice; the drawing-room wallpaper; the smell of the mats. A part of this Sally must always be; Peter must always be. But she must leave them. There were the Bradshaws, whom she disliked. She must go up to Lady Bradshaw (in grey and silver, balancing like a sea-lion at the edge of its tank, barking for invitations, Duchesses, the typical successful man's wife), she must go up to Lady Bradshaw and say . . .

But Lady Bradshaw anticipated her.

"We are shockingly late, dear Mrs. Dalloway, we hardly dared to come in," she said.

And Sir William, who looked very distinguished, with his grey hair and blue eyes, said yes; they had not been able to resist the temptation. He was talking to Richard about that Bill probably, which they wanted to get through the Commons. Why did the sight of him, talking to Richard, curl her up? He looked what he was, a great doctor. A man absolutely at the head of his profession, very powerful, rather worn. For think what cases came before him—people in the uttermost depths of misery; people on the verge of insanity; husbands and wives. He had to decide questions of

appalling difficulty. Yet—what she felt was, one wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man.

"How is your son at Eton?" she asked Lady Bradshaw.

He had just missed his eleven,⁵ said Lady Bradshaw, because of the mumps. His father minded even more than he did, she thought "being," she said, "nothing but a great boy himself."

Clarissa looked at Sir William, talking to Richard. He did not look like a boy—not in the least like a boy. She had once gone with some one to ask his advice. He had been perfectly right; extremely sensible. But Heavens—what a relief to get out to the street again! There was some poor wretch sobbing, she remembered, in the waiting-room. But she did not know what it was—about Sir William; what exactly she disliked. Only Richard agreed with her, "didn't like his taste, didn't like his smell." But he was extraordinarily able. They were talking about this Bill. Some case, Sir William was mentioning, lowering his voice. It had its bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock.⁶ There must be some provision in the Bill.

Sinking her voice, drawing Mrs. Dalloway into the shelter of a common femininity, a common pride in the illustrious qualities of husbands and their sad tendency to overwork, Lady Bradshaw (poor goose—one didn't dislike her) murmured how, "just as we were starting, my husband was called up on the telephone, a very sad case. A young man (that is what Sir William is telling Mr. Dalloway) had killed himself. He had been in the army." Oh! thought Clarissa, in the middle of my party, here's death, she thought.

She went on, into the little room where the Prime Minister had gone with Lady Bruton. Perhaps there was somebody there. But there was nobody. The chairs still kept the impress of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton, she turned deferentially, he sitting four-square, authoritatively. They had been talking about India. There was nobody. The party's splendour fell to the floor, so strange it was to come in alone in her finery.

What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—

the Bradshaws, talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!

She had once thrown a shilling into the Serpentine, never anything more. But he had flung it away. They went on living (she would have to go back; the rooms were still crowded; people kept on coming). They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate; people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded, one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself—had he plunged holding his treasure? "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy,"² she had said to herself once, coming down in white.

Or there were the poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that?

Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the *Times*, so that she could

crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself.

Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success. Lady Bexborough and the rest of it. And once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton.

It was due to Richard; she had never been so happy. Nothing could be slow enough; nothing last too long. No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost herself in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank. Many a time had she gone, at Bourton when they were all talking, to look at the sky, or seen it between people's shoulders at dinner; seen it in London when she could not sleep. She walked to the window.

It held, foolish as the idea was, something of her own in it, this country sky, this sky above Westminster. She parted the curtains; she looked. Oh, but how surprising!—in the room opposite the old lady stared straight at her! She was going to bed. And the sky. It will be a solemn sky, she had thought, it will be a dusky sky, turning away its cheek in beauty. But there it was—ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds. It was new to her. The wind must have risen. She was going to bed, in the room opposite. It was fascinating to watch her, moving about, that old lady, crossing the room, coming to the window. Could she see her? It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed. She pulled the blind now. The clock began striking. The young man had killed himself; but she did not pity him; with the clock striking the hour, one, two, three, she did not pity him, with all this going on. There! the old lady had put out her light! the whole house was dark now with this going on, she repeated, and the words came to her, Fear

no more the heat of the sun. She must go back to them. But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room.

“But where is Clarissa?” said Peter. He was sitting on the sofa with Sally. (After all these years he really could not call her “Lady Rosseter.”) “Where’s the woman gone to?” he asked. “Where’s Clarissa?”

Sally supposed, and so did Peter for the matter of that, that there were people of importance, politicians, whom neither of them knew unless by sight in the picture papers, whom Clarissa had to be nice to, had to talk to. She was with them. Yet there was Richard Dalloway not in the Cabinet. He hadn’t been a success, Sally supposed? For herself, she scarcely ever read the papers. She sometimes saw his name mentioned. But then—well, she lived a very solitary life, in the wilds, Clarissa would say, among great merchants, great manufacturers, men, after all, who did things. She had done things too!

“I have five sons!” she told him.

Lord, Lord, what a change had come over her! the softness of motherhood; its egotism too. Last time they met, Peter remembered, had been among the cauliflowers in the moonlight, the leaves “like rough bronze” she had said, with her literary turn; and she had picked a rose. She had marched him up and down that awful night, after the scene by the fountain; he was to catch the midnight train. Heavens, he had wept!

That was his old trick, opening a pocket-knife, thought Sally, always opening and shutting a knife when he got excited. They had been very, very intimate, she and Peter Walsh, when he was in love with Clarissa, and there was that dreadful, ridiculous scene over Richard Dalloway at lunch. She had called Richard “Wickham.” Why not call Richard “Wickham”? Clarissa had flared up! and indeed they

had never seen each other since, she and Clarissa, not more than half a dozen times perhaps in the last ten years. And Peter Walsh had gone off to India, and she had heard vaguely that he had made an unhappy marriage, and she didn't know whether he had any children, and she couldn't ask him, for he had changed. He was rather shrivelled-looking, but kinder, she felt, and she had a real affection for him, for he was connected with her youth, and she still had a little Emily Brontë⁸ he had given her, and he was to write, surely? In those days he was to write.

"Have you written?" she asked him, spreading her hand, her firm and shapely hand, on her knee in a way he recalled.

"Not a word!" said Peter Walsh, and she laughed.

She was still attractive, still a personage, Sally Seton. But who was this Rosseter? He wore two camelias on his wedding day—that was all Peter knew of him. "They have myriads of servants, miles of conservatories,"⁹ Clarissa wrote; something like that. Sally owned it with a shout of laughter.

"Yes, I have ten thousand a year"—whether before the tax was paid or after, she couldn't remember, for her husband, "whom you must meet," she said, "whom you would like," she said, did all that for her.

And Sally used to be in rags and tatters. She had pawned her grandmother's ring which Marie Antoinette had given her great-grandfather to come to Bourton.

Oh yes, Sally remembered; she had it still, a ruby ring which Marie Antoinette had given her great-grandfather. She never had a penny to her name in those days, and going to Bourton always meant some frightful pinch. But going to Bourton had meant so much to her—had kept her sane, she believed, so unhappy had she been at home. But that was all a thing of the past—all over now, she said. And Mr. Parry was dead; and Miss Parry was still alive. Never had he had such a shock in his life! said Peter. He had been quite certain she was dead. And the marriage had been, Sally supposed, a success? And that very handsome, very self-possessed young woman was Elizabeth, over there, by the curtains, in red.¹

(She was like a poplar, she was like a river, she was like a hyacinth, Willie Titcomb was thinking. Oh how much nicer to be in the country and do what she liked! She could hear her poor dog howling, Elizabeth was certain.) She was not a bit like Clarissa, Peter Walsh said.

"Oh, Clarissa!" said Sally.

What Sally felt was simply this. She had owed Clarissa an enormous amount. They had been friends, not acquaintances, friends, and she still saw Clarissa all in white going about the house with her hands full of flowers—to this day tobacco plants made her think of Bourton. But—did Peter understand?—she lacked something. Lacked what was it? She had charm; she had extraordinary charm. But to be frank (and she felt that Peter was an old friend, a real friend—did absence matter? did distance matter? She had often wanted to write to him, but torn it up, yet felt he understood, for people understand without things being said, as one realises growing old, and old she was, had been that afternoon to see her sons at Eton, where they had the mumps), to be quite frank then, how could Clarissa have done it?—married Richard Dalloway? a sportsman, a man who cared only for dogs. Literally, when he came into the room he smelt of the stables. And then all this? She waved her hand.

Hugh Whitbread it was, strolling past in his white waistcoat, dim, fat, blind, past everything he looked, except self-esteem and comfort.

"He's not going to recognise *us*," said Sally, and really she hadn't the courage—so that was Hugh! the admirable Hugh!

"And what does he do?" she asked Peter.

He blacked the King's boots or counted bottles at Windsor,² Peter told her. Peter kept his sharp tongue still! But Sally must be frank, Peter said. That kiss now, Hugh's.

On the lips, she assured him, in the smoking-room one evening. She went straight to Clarissa in a rage. Hugh didn't do such things! Clarissa said, the admirable Hugh! Hugh's socks were without

exception the most beautiful she had ever seen—and now his evening dress. Perfect! And had he children?

"Everybody in the room has six sons at Eton," Peter told her, except himself. He, thank God, had none. No sons, no daughters, no wife. Well, he didn't seem to mind, said Sally. He looked younger, she thought, than any of them.

But it had been a silly thing to do, in many ways, Peter said, to marry like that; "a perfect goose she was," he said, but, he said, "we had a splendid time of it," but how could that be? Sally wondered; what did he mean? and how odd it was to know him and yet not know a single thing that had happened to him. And did he say it out of pride? Very likely, for after all it must be galling for him (though he was an oddity, a sort of sprite, not at all an ordinary man), it must be lonely at his age to have no home, nowhere to go to. But he must stay with them for weeks and weeks. Of course he would; he would love to stay with them, and that was how it came out. All these years the Dalloways had never been once. Time after time they had asked them. Clarissa (for it was Clarissa of course) would not come. For, said Sally, Clarissa was at heart a snob—one had to admit it, a snob. And it was that that was between them, she was convinced. Clarissa thought she had married beneath her, her husband being—she was proud of it—a miner's son. Every penny they had he had earned. As a little boy (her voice trembled) he had carried great sacks.

(And so she would go on, Peter felt, hour after hour; the miner's son; people thought she had married beneath her; her five sons; and what was the other thing—plants, hydrangeas, syringas, very, very rare hibiscus lilies that never grow north of the Suez Canal,³ but she, with one gardener in a suburb near Manchester, had beds of them, positively beds! Now all that Clarissa had escaped, unmaternal as she was.)

A snob was she? Yes, in many ways. Where was she, all this time? It was getting late.

"Yet," said Sally, "when I heard Clarissa was giving a party, I felt I couldn't *not* come—must see her again (and I'm staying in Victoria

Street, practically next door). So I just came without an invitation. But," she whispered, "tell me, do. Who is this?"

It was Mrs. Hilbery, looking for the door. For how late it was getting! And, she murmured, as the night grew later, as people went, one found old friends; quiet nooks and corners; and the loveliest views. Did they know, she asked, that they were surrounded by an enchanted garden? Lights and trees and wonderful gleaming lakes and the sky. Just a few fairy lamps,⁴ Clarissa Dalloway had said, in the back garden! But she was a magician! It was a park. . . . And she didn't know their names, but friends she knew they were, friends without names, songs without words, always the best. But there were so many doors, such unexpected places, she could not find her way.

"Old Mrs. Hilbery," said Peter; but who was that? that lady standing by the curtain all the evening, without speaking? He knew her face; connected her with Bourton. Surely she used to cut up underclothes at the large table in the window? Davidson, was that her name?

"Oh, that is Ellie Henderson," said Sally. Clarissa was really very hard on her. She was a cousin, very poor. Clarissa *was* hard on people.

She was rather, said Peter. Yet, said Sally, in her emotional way, with a rush of that enthusiasm which Peter used to love her for, yet dreaded a little now, so effusive she might become—how generous to her friends Clarissa was! and what a rare quality one found it, and how sometimes at night or on Christmas Day, when she counted up her blessings, she put that friendship first. They were young; that was it. Clarissa was pure-hearted; that was it. Peter would think her sentimental. So she was. For she had come to feel that it was the only thing worth saying—what one felt. Cleverness was silly. One must say simply what one felt.

"But I do not know," said Peter Walsh, "what I feel."

Poor Peter, thought Sally. Why did not Clarissa come and talk to them? That was what he was longing for. She knew it. All the time he was thinking only of Clarissa, and was fidgeting with his knife.

He had not found life simple, Peter said. His relations with Clarissa had not been simple. It had spoilt his life, he said. (They had been so intimate—he and Sally Seton, it was absurd not to say it.) One could not be in love twice, he said. And what could she say? Still, it is better to have loved (but he would think her sentimental—he used to be so sharp). He must come and stay with them in Manchester. That is all very true, he said. All very true. He would love to come and stay with them, directly he had done what he had to do in London.

And Clarissa had cared for him more than she had ever cared for Richard. Sally was positive of that.

“No, no, no!” said Peter (Sally should not have said that—she went too far). That good fellow—there he was at the end of the room, holding forth, the same as ever, dear old Richard. Who was he talking to? Sally asked, that very distinguished-looking man? Living in the wilds as she did, she had an insatiable curiosity to know who people were. But Peter did not know. He did not like his looks, he said, probably a Cabinet Minister. Of them all, Richard seemed to him the best, he said—the most disinterested.

“But what has he done?” Sally asked. Public work, she supposed. And were they happy together? Sally asked (she herself was extremely happy); for, she admitted, she knew nothing about them, only jumped to conclusions, as one does, for what can one know even of the people one lives with every day? she asked. Are we not all prisoners? She had read a wonderful play about a man who scratched on the wall of his cell,⁵ and she had felt that was true of life—one scratched on the wall. Despairing of human relationships (people were so difficult), she often went into her garden and got from her flowers a peace which men and women never gave her. But no; he did not like cabbages; he preferred human beings, Peter said. Indeed, the young are beautiful, Sally said, watching Elizabeth cross the room. How unlike Clarissa at her age! Could he make anything of her? She would not open her lips. Not much, not yet, Peter admitted. She was like a lily, Sally said, a lily by the side of a pool.

But Peter did not agree that we know nothing. We know everything, he said; at least he did.

But these two, Sally whispered, these two coming now (and really she must go, if Clarissa did not come soon), this distinguished-looking man and his rather common-looking wife who had been talking to Richard—what could one know about people like that?

"That they're damnable humbugs," said Peter, looking at them casually. He made Sally laugh.

But Sir William Bradshaw stopped at the door to look at a picture. He looked in the corner for the engraver's name. His wife looked too. Sir William Bradshaw was so interested in art.

When one was young, said Peter, one was too much excited to know people. Now that one was old, fifty-two⁶ to be precise (Sally was fifty-five, in body, she said, but her heart was like a girl's of twenty); now that one was mature then, said Peter, one could watch, one could understand, and one did not lose the power of feeling, he said. No, that is true, said Sally. She felt more deeply, more passionately, every year. It increased, he said, alas, perhaps, but one should be glad of it—it went on increasing in his experience. There was some one in India. He would like to tell Sally about her. He would like Sally to know her. She was married, he said. She had two small children. They must all come to Manchester, said Sally—he must promise before they left.

There's Elizabeth, he said, she feels not half what we feel, not yet. But, said Sally, watching Elizabeth go to her father, one can see they are devoted to each other. She could feel it by the way Elizabeth went to her father.

For her father had been looking at her, as he stood talking to the Bradshaws, and he had thought to himself, Who is that lovely girl? And suddenly he realised that it was his Elizabeth, and he had not recognised her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock! Elizabeth had felt him looking at her as she talked to Willie Titcomb. So she went to him and they stood together, now that the party was almost over, looking at the people going, and the rooms getting emptier and emptier, with things scattered on the floor. Even Ellie Henderson was

going, nearly last of all, though no one had spoken to her, but she had wanted to see everything, to tell Edith. And Richard and Elizabeth were rather glad it was over, but Richard was proud of his daughter. And he had not meant to tell her, but he could not help telling her. He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, Who is that lovely girl? and it was his daughter! That did make her happy. But her poor dog was howling.

"Richard has improved. You are right," said Sally. "I shall go and talk to him. I shall say good-night. What does the brain matter," said Lady Rosseter, getting up, "compared with the heart?"

"I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?

It is Clarissa, he said.

For there she was.

1925

Endnotes

- Note 1: Clarissa Dalloway's maid.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Caterers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Village in western England and Mrs. Dalloway's childhood home.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A warehouse van.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: London borough that includes Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, and Westminster Abbey.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The 1918–19 worldwide influenza pandemic had killed over 20 million people.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Clarissa is walking north. "Big Ben": the name for the Great Bell in the clock tower above the Houses of Parliament.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Grumpy, shabbily dressed people.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: World War I (1914–18).[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Street fair with many stalls selling a variety of goods to benefit a charitable organization.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Buckingham Palace, where King George V (1865–1936) and Queen Mary (1867–1953) resided.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Hurlingham Club in Ranelagh Gardens in southwest London, where polo is played. “Lords”: the cricket ground at St John’s Wood in north London. “Ascot”: a town west of London with an annual horse race. Summer sporting events at all three locations have long been fixtures of the London social season.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Era of the combined reigns of the Kings George I–IV (1714–1830).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: St. James’s Park, home to many kinds of water birds and a frequent haunt of politicians.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Sign indicating that the box contains papers to or from the royal family.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Spa town in southwest England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Modest London borough southwest of Westminster.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Since 1909 a wireless antenna on the Admiralty building in Whitehall had enabled communication by telegraph with British ships at sea.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Intersection at the northeast corner of Green Park, part of a luxurious district containing the Ritz Hotel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Works by English poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744). “Wagner”: Richard Wilhelm Wagner (1813–1883), German composer famous for his grandly staged operas.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Green Park’s northeast gate on Piccadilly.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Her governess.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Private homes near Piccadilly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A large, winding pond in Hyde Park.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Important shopping street in northwest London.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A bookstore.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From a song bidding farewell to the supposedly dead heroine of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (4.2.258–81).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:
Book invented by Woolf. "Jorrocks' *Jaunts and Jollities*": 1838 collection of stories about a Cockney grocer named Jorrocks by English sporting novelist Robert Smith Surtees (1805–1864). "Soapy Sponge": character in another novel by Surtees, *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour* (1853). "Mrs. Asquith's *Memoirs*" two-volume autobiography (1920–1922) of Emma Alice Margaret (Margot) Asquith (1864–1945), wife of Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith (served 1908–16).
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Used for dog grooming. "Distemper": an animal disease characterized by cough, loss of strength, and a discharge from the nose or eyes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Peoples suffering poor economies after World War I and the Russian Revolution.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Raincoat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Nickname for valerian, an herb with white or pink flowers.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A car has backfired.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, perfume.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Because the car stalled, the driver has to crank its starting handle before returning to his seat and continuing to drive.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Road running along the River Thames between Westminster and Blackfriars Bridges.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Exclusive club in Ranelagh Gardens (see p. 291, n. 3).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Street in Mayfair that crosses Bond Street. From here, Clarissa turns south again and walks home to Westminster.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Worn on King Charles II's birthday (May 29) to commemorate his restoration in 1660.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pub.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Someone from one of the colonies of the British Empire.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, the British royal family.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Uproar, fracas.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Light garment showing under a waistcoat.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Aristocratic gentlemen's club on St. James's Street.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Journal reporting high-society news.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Acoustical effect whereby a curved wall, ceiling, or doorframe carries a soft sound, such as the whispering gallery in the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Guard on duty at Marlborough House, the residence of Queen Alexandra (1844–1925), the widow of King Edward VII. "Sentries at St. James's": guards at St. James's Palace. Both the palace and the house are within view of the car's route down St. James's Street.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Queen Victoria's statue outside the entrance to Buckingham Palace.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Wide avenue that leads from the Admiralty Arch along St. James's Park to Buckingham Palace.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Officers of the royal household.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Doll house designed by British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944) in 1923 for Queen Mary.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII (1894–1972), is compared to his grandfather, King Edward VII (1841–1910). Princess Mary (1897–1965), the only daughter of King George V and Queen Mary, married Viscount Lascelles (1882–1947) in 1922.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Apartment complex in Piccadilly, housing politicians.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: The Royal Marines Memorial, completed in 1903 in memory of those who served in artillery and light infantry regiments and died in wars in South Africa and China (1889–1902). The memorial is located in St. James’s Park near the Admiralty Arch.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The first demonstration of skywriting for advertising, in which Major Cyril Turner wrote the words “Daily Mail,” occurred over Epsom Downs, a racecourse southwest of London, in 1922.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Name of a baby formula and the firm that produced it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Royal park north of St. James’s Park.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: North–south pedestrian avenue in Regent’s Park in north London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In World War I (1914–18).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Wheeled chairs for invalids.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Italy.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Drinking fountain resembling a cross at the north end of the Broad Walk and commemorating the protection of Parsis, Indian Zoroastrians, under British colonial rule in India.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The Roman Empire included most of Britain from 43 to 410 C.E.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Woolf wrote of having a similar experience during a 1904 breakdown, in her 1922 memoir “Old Bloomsbury.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See the River Styx, separating the living from the realm of the dead in the mythical Greek underworld.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In Regent’s Park.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Upright sticks that, with cross-pieces called bails, form the wicket defended by the batsman in cricket.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Underground (subway).[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Colloquially, one travels “up” to London even if, as in this case, one is actually traveling south from Scotland’s capital.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Street in east London.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Working-class neighborhood in north London near Hampstead Heath.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Seaside town in the county of Kent, west of London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London borough south of the Thames.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: St. Paul’s Cathedral, the tallest building in London in 1923.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: German-born theoretical physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) won the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Risky buying and selling for profit.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Laws of genetics studied by Austrian monk Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) in his work with pea plants.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: London intersection west of St. Paul’s Cathedral.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See p. 294 and n. 9.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Memoirs by French general Jean-Baptiste Antoine Marcellin, baron de Marbot (1782–1854), describe the disastrous Russian campaign undertaken in the winter of 1812 by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Now Istanbul, Turkey. “Clieveden”: forest on the banks of the Thames.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Queen of France and wife of Louis XVI (1755–1793), guillotined during the French Revolution.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a book by the English textile designer, writer, and socialist (1834–1896).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), English Romantic poet. Plato (ca. 429–347 B.C.E.), Greek philosopher.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: From Shakespeare's *Othello* 2.1.87–88.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Toy balloon.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Johannes Brahms (1837–1897), German Romantic composer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Small box.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A slim knife used, for example, for slitting open letters.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Town south of London in the county of Surrey.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: District in west London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hertfordshire estate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, after five years working in India as a colonial administrator. Peter Walsh's position there would have become more complicated following the 1919 Amritsar Massacre. It created strong anti-British sentiment and led to the Government of India Act, which established a national parliament, and the beginning of Mohandas Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience (1920).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Group of members of Parliament charged with overseeing a particular issue. "The House": the House of Commons, the lower house of Parliament. "Conservative": member of the Conservative Party, the less reforming of the (usually) two major political parties.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: British Army stationed in India.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Compelled to leave the university as a punishment.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: One of the Inns of Court, or legal societies, that admitted people to the bar to practice law.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The highest point in southeast England, in the county of Surrey, famous for its early summer flowers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Manual laborers in British colonies, usually from the lower classes.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Bells of the parish church for the Houses of Parliament, situated on the grounds of Westminster Abbey.[Return to](#)

[reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Street in Westminster and site of government buildings. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Equestrian statue of Prince George, Duke of Cambridge (1819–1904), commander in chief of the army and grandson of King George III. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The boys, probably members of the London Cadets, have come from east London, near the Armoury House, to place a wreath at the Cenotaph, a World War I memorial. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:
Monumental statues in Trafalgar Square commemorating the 1805 battle in which the British defeated Napoleon's navy. The statue of the hero of the battle, Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), appears on top of Nelson's Column. The statue of Henry Havelock (1795–1857), killed while serving in India, stands on the southeast plinth of the square. The statue of army officer Charles George Gordon (1833–1885), killed while serving in the Sudan, would be removed in 1943. The silhouetted statues all appear black.
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Street running east from Trafalgar Square. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Street to the west of Trafalgar Square, running northwest toward Piccadilly Circus. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: With a dark complexion or black hair, that is, not of African descent. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Street connecting Trafalgar Square with Haymarket. Instead of turning here, Walsh follows the young woman up Regent Street (which runs parallel to Haymarket), crosses Piccadilly, and continues north toward Regent's Park. "Dent's shop": headquarters of the company that constructed Big Ben. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pirate. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Walsh follows north along Regent Street, crosses Oxford Street, and then turns into a street near Great Portland Street,

- which leads into Regent's Park.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Diamondlike shapes.[Return to reference 4](#)
 - Note 5: A person of British heritage born in India.[Return to reference 5](#)
 - Note 6: Possibly the Matilda drinking fountain, with a statue of a milkmaid.[Return to reference 6](#)
 - Note 7: See George Wickham, the villainous suitor in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by English novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817).[Return to reference 7](#)
 - Note 8: Perhaps Walsh opens the cover on his pocket watch and pretends that the child has blown it open.[Return to reference 8](#)
 - Note 9: Royal palace on the Thames in western London, near Richmond.[Return to reference 9](#)
 - Note 1: Charles Darwin (1809–1882), English scientist whose writings laid the foundation for the study of evolution.[Return to reference 1](#)
 - Note 2: Region of Greece also known as Aeolia.[Return to reference 2](#)
 - Note 3: Toilets.[Return to reference 3](#)
 - Note 4: Large industrial city in northern England.[Return to reference 4](#)
 - Note 5: Campaigns by suffragists led to the right to vote for British women thirty and older in 1918 and, in 1928, for women twenty-one and older. Thus the topic was hardly “antediluvian,” that is, antiquated or outdated.[Return to reference 5](#)
 - Note 6: Prostitutes.[Return to reference 6](#)
 - Note 7: Fee-paying secondary school (British).[Return to reference 7](#)
 - Note 8: City in Monaco with a famous casino.[Return to reference 8](#)
 - Note 9: Begged for employment.[Return to reference 9](#)
 - Note 1: Powerful, sometimes secretive or corrupt, civil servant.[Return to reference 1](#)
 - Note 2: Richard's views are typical of the Conservative Party. Tariff reform would have been intended to protect British goods.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Conservative daily newspaper.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895), English biologist, and John Tyndall (1820–1893), English physicist. The work of both scientists challenged Victorians’ religious worldviews.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A fee-paying girls’ day school.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, introduced to society, presented at Court, and participating in the social life of a debutante.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Area in London east of Regent’s Park, accessible by walking east along the Marylebone Road, which lies to the south of the park.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Entertainment and shopping district to the west of Portland Place, a street running south from the Regent’s Park Tube station toward Oxford Street.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Bags made from smooth linen fabric often used as furniture covering.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Town south of London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Town in Gloucestershire, west of London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Road running east from the Regent’s Park Tube (subway) station toward King’s Cross, a busy train station.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Road running south from the Thames. Miss Pole likely teaches classes for Morley College in the Old Vic Theater.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Keats (1795–1821), English Romantic poet.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Tragedy by Shakespeare.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), Irish playwright, journalist, and Fabian Socialist. “*The History of Civilisation*” (1857–61): two-volume study of human interaction with nature, by English writer Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–1862).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Fictional real estate company.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Roman goddess of agriculture.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Residential district in north London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Agreement ending World War I, November 11, 1918.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Linen or cotton fabric.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Soft gray fur from rodents native to South America.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Description of hell in one of three parts of *The Divine Comedy*, by Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265–1321).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: London district known for its cosmopolitanism, entertainment, and sex industries.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Port city on the English Channel south of London.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Major London road running north through Bloomsbury, home to Woolf and her friends, toward the Euston Road.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Greek dramatist (ca. 525–426 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The monarch traditionally gives a speech to begin the annual session of Parliament. “The Tower”: the Tower of London, fortress and royal palace on the Thames, begun in 1078. “Victoria and Albert Museum”: exhibition of applied arts opened in 1909.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Diminutives of Thomas and Albert, common British names.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Potassium bromide, likely taken as a sedative.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Residential area in Bloomsbury.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A popular street for doctors, running south from the Marylebone Road.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Eton College, aristocratic boys’ school in southwest England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Church officer responsible for its property and grounds.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A period of inactivity was commonly prescribed to treat mental illness.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Suicide was illegal in Britain until 1961.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Instruments of torture.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A stone is a measure of weight equal to fourteen pounds, hence an increase from 104 to 168 pounds.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Outskirts, borders, or slums.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Speaker's Corner, at the northeast corner of Hyde Park, where anyone may stand and talk on any subject.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: English county south of London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Greenwich Mean Time, international standard for deriving time since 1884, is calculated by the Royal Observatory, located on the prime meridian in the London borough of Greenwich. "Messrs. Rigby and Lowndes": fictional department store with a clock.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: English county northeast of London.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Major London newspaper since the 1780s.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: City on the English Channel with a naval base.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Posh neighborhood east of Hyde Park.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Large flat fish.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cavalry soldiers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: English lyric poets Richard Lovelace (1617–1657) and Robert Herrick (1591–1634), noted for their love poems and known as Cavalier poets because of their support for Charles I (1600–1649) in the English Civil War.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Failed badly.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Mayfair.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, in excellent health.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: In response to Britain's supposedly "surplus" population and resultant worries about employment, Lady Bruton favors a project encouraging young people to emigrate to Canada, which had suffered great losses in World War I.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Unspoken or repressed.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, whenever a Labour Government comes to power, Richard, a Conservative, might be voted out of office and thus become free to write her family history.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Deep green stone.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: County in southwest England.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Street in Mayfair. Richard and Hugh appear to have walked east on Brook Street and then south on Bond Street to this intersection.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the style of, or dating from, the reign of King James I (1603–25).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Small boat; dinghy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Street vendors who sell fruit from open carts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In uniform, presumably that of park officials.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Of Saxon heritage. The brothers Horsa and Hengist were said to have begun the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain in the fifth century C.E. "Kensington": London borough west of Hyde Park, where Kensington Gardens and Kensington Palace are located.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Residential area that was once part of the gardens of Westminster Abbey belonging to its dean.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Armenians, a Christian minority in Turkey, were persecuted; 1.75 million were forced to emigrate between 1915 and 1921. Their plight is more likely to be the subject of Richard's meeting than that of the Albanians, who, after a period of unrest (1908–21), had their territorial security guaranteed by the League of Nations.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: London borough north of Hyde Park. South Kensington: borough south of Hyde Park.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Person from Mongolia, in Asia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Almond-shaped, presumably, and suggestive to Britons at this time of an “oriental” mystery.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Religious Society of Friends, known as the Quakers.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Teaching students who are not part of a typical degree program.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A cylindrical warmer for both hands.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street, founded as a cooperative society to supply cheap goods to military families.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Joseph Addison (1672–1719), English politician and writer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mailbox shaped like a pillar.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Store selling oils, paints, and other art supplies.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Childbirth.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Roman Catholic cathedral (1903) on Victoria Street, with a high bell tower.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Westminster Abbey, Anglican cathedral near Parliament.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Effigies of monarchs buried in the Abbey, such as Elizabeth I, located in the Abbey Museum.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, in the Abbey’s nave, commemorates the dead of World War I; it contains the body of an unidentified soldier, buried there on November 11, 1920.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: King’s Counsel, senior barrister or lawyer.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Large 18th-century neoclassical building, between the Strand and the Thames Embankment, housing the national registry for births, marriages, and deaths.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A center of the legal profession.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Temple Church, shared by two of the Inns of Court, at the foot of Chancery Lane, between Fleet Street and the

Thames.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Center of the newspaper industry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Room for storing provisions, especially meat.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1819–1861), husband of Queen Victoria.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Port city on the river Hull, near the North Sea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Shelf at the back or side of the fireplace.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Headline indicating that the Surrey cricket team has ended its first innings in a match.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Popular seaside resort town in Sussex, on England's south coast.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: National museum in Bloomsbury.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Street market held on Fridays in north London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Road through the theater district, running northeast from Piccadilly Circus to Covent Garden.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The river Severn, in Gloucestershire.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Small bird with a characteristic tail-wagging motion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Puritanical or prudish.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Multiple daily mail deliveries in the 1920s ensure that Clarissa could write a letter and Peter could receive it on the same day.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Main library at Oxford University.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, to meet the required standard.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An open carriage with two back-to-back seats, one facing forward for the driver and another facing toward the rear for the passenger.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Major port city in northwest England, on the Irish Sea.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Incompetent people, fools.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Boxes for carrying important messages requiring quick delivery.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gentlemen's club for members of the East India Company.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Daylight Saving Time, introduced in Britain in 1916.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Four-volume French dictionary by Émile Littré (1801–1881).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Penny or halfpenny.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In Bloomsbury.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Gnatlike insects.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Commotion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947) was prime minister in 1923.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Meat-flavored jelly. "Cullenders": colanders.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Metal plates in stoves that regulate air flow and thus control the intensity of the fire.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sweet Hungarian wine.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Birds native to New Guinea, notable for the beautiful plumage of the males.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thin, dry cookies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, a man with an elite education from a British public school, analogous to an American private school.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Painting by English portraitist Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: District in north London near Regent's Park.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Flitting phosphorescent light seen at night in marshes; colloquially, something misleading.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: John Milton (1608–1674), English poet.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German composer.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: A preserved open area in north London, popular with artists.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: British colonial name for Sri Lanka. “Burma in the ‘seventies”: southeast Asian country now known as Myanmar, formerly part of the British Empire, which fought three wars to annex it, in 1824–26, 1852, and 1885.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: For example, the 1857 Indian Rebellion, or Indian Mutiny, of Indian troops against British colonial rule. “Viceroys”: British governors of colonial territories.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Shakespeare’s play *Richard II* 2.1.57.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See the Greek goddess Athena, often represented with armor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: British national flag.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Flat-bottomed, shallow boat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: His cricket team, made up of eleven players.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Psychological disturbance caused by prolonged exposure to combat (at first thought to be a reaction to the sound of exploding bombshells). The War Office undertook an official inquiry into the subject and issued a report, printed in the *Times* in 1922, that recognized the complexity of the illness. The condition today is known as post-traumatic stress disorder.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See p. 308 and n. 5.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A book by the English novelist and poet (1818–1848).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Greenhouses.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Earlier described as pink.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Windsor Castle, a royal residence west of London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Canal in Egypt connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Seas.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Small colored lights often hung in trees for decoration.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: See Shakespeare's *Richard II* 5.5.19–21.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Earlier, fifty-three years old.[Return to reference 6](#)

From A Room of One's Own

[SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER]¹

It was disappointing not to have brought back in the evening some important statement, some authentic fact. Women are poorer than men because—this or that. Perhaps now it would be better to give up seeking for the truth, and receiving on one's head an avalanche of opinion hot as lava, discoloured as dish-water. It would be better to draw the curtains; to shut out distractions; to light the lamp to narrow the enquiry and to ask the historian, who records not opinions but facts, to describe under what conditions women lived, not throughout the ages, but in England, say in the time of Elizabeth.²

For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet. What were the conditions in which women lived, I asked myself; for fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.

I went, therefore, to the shelf where the histories stand and took down one of the latest, Professor Trevelyan's *History of England*.³ Once more I looked up Women, found "position of," and turned to the pages indicated. "Wife-beating," I read, "was a recognised right of man, and was practised without shame by high as well as low. . . . Similarly," the historian goes on, "the daughter who refused to

marry the gentleman of her parents' choice was liable to be locked up, beaten and flung about the room, without any shock being inflicted on public opinion. Marriage was not an affair of personal affection, but of family avarice, particularly in the 'chivalrous' upper classes. . . . Betrothal often took place while one or both of the parties was in the cradle, and marriage when they were scarcely out of the nurses' charge." That was about 1470, soon after Chaucer's time. The next reference to the position of women is some two hundred years later, in the time of the Stuarts.⁴ "It was still the exception for women of the upper and middle class to choose their own husbands, and when the husband had been assigned, he was lord and master, so far at least as law and custom could make him. Yet even so," Professor Trevelyan concludes, "neither Shakespeare's women nor those of authentic seventeenth-century memoirs, like the Verneys and the Hutchinsons,⁵ seem wanting in personality and character." Certainly, if we consider it, Cleopatra must have had a way with her; Lady Macbeth, one would suppose, had a will of her own; Rosalind,⁶ one might conclude, was an attractive girl. Professor Trevelyan is speaking no more than the truth when he remarks that Shakespeare's women do not seem wanting in personality and character. Not being a historian, one might go even further and say that women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time—Clytemnestra, Antigone, Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Phèdre, Cressida, Rosalind, Desdemona, the Duchess of Malfi, among the dramatists; then among the prose writers: Millamant, Clarissa, Becky Sharp, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, Madame de Guermantes⁷—the names flock to mind, nor do they recall women "lacking in personality and character." Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance, very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater.⁸ But this is woman in fiction. In fact, as Professor Trevelyan points out, she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room.

A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband.

It was certainly an odd monster that one made up by reading the historians first and the poets afterwards—a worm winged like an eagle; the spirit of life and beauty in a kitchen chopping up suet. But these monsters, however amusing to the imagination, have no existence in fact. What one must do to bring her to life was to think poetically and prosaically at one and the same moment, thus keeping in touch with fact—that she is Mrs Martin, aged thirty-six, dressed in blue, wearing a black hat and brown shoes; but not losing sight of fiction either—that she is a vessel in which all sorts of spirits and forces are coursing and flashing perpetually. The moment, however, that one tries this method with the Elizabethan woman, one branch of illumination fails; one is held up by the scarcity of facts. One knows nothing detailed, nothing perfectly true and substantial about her. History scarcely mentions her. And I turned to Professor Trevelyan again to see what history meant to him. I found by looking at his chapter headings that it meant—

“The Manor Court and the Methods of Open-field Agriculture . . . The Cistercians and Sheep-farming . . . The Crusades . . . The University . . . The House of Commons . . . The Hundred Years’ War . . . The Wars of the Roses . . . The Renaissance Scholars . . . The Dissolution of the Monasteries . . . Agrarian and Religious Strife . . . The Origin of English Sea-power . . . The Armada . . .” and so on. Occasionally an individual woman is mentioned, an Elizabeth, or a Mary; a queen or a great lady. But by no possible means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in any one of the great movements

which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past. Nor shall we find her in any collection of anecdotes. Aubrey⁹ hardly mentions her. She never writes her own life and scarcely keeps a diary; there are only a handful of her letters in existence. She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her. What one wants, I thought—and why does not some brilliant student at Newnham or Girton¹ supply it?—is a mass of information; at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books; the life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it. It would be ambitious beyond my daring, I thought, looking about the shelves for books that were not there, to suggest to the students of those famous colleges that they should re-write history, though I own that it often seems a little queer as it is, unreal, lop-sided; but why should they not add a supplement to history? calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that women might figure there without impropriety? For one often catches a glimpse of them in the lives of the great, whisking away into the background, concealing, I sometimes think, a wink a laugh, perhaps a tear. And, after all, we have lives enough of Jane Austen;² it scarcely seems necessary to consider again the influence of the tragedies of Joanna Baillie upon the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe;³ as for myself, I should not mind if the homes and haunts of Mary Russell Mitford⁴ were closed to the public for a century at least. But what I find deplorable, I continued, looking about the bookshelves again, is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. I have no model in my mind to turn about this way and that. Here am I asking why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age, and I am not sure how they were educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting-rooms to themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night. They had no money evidently;

according to Professor Trevelyan they were married whether they liked it or not before they were out of the nursery, at fifteen or sixteen very likely. It would have been extremely odd, even upon this showing, had one of them suddenly written the plays of Shakespeare, I concluded, and I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, who declared that it was impossible for any woman, past, present, or to come, to have the genius of Shakespeare. He wrote to the papers about it. He also told a lady who applied to him for information that cats do not as a matter of fact go to heaven, though they have, he added, souls of a sort. How much thinking those old gentlemen used to save one! How the borders of ignorance shrank back at their approach! Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the plays of Shakespeare.

Be that as it may, I could not help thinking, as I looked at the works of Shakespeare on the shelf, that the bishop was right at least in this; it would have been impossible, completely and entirely, for any woman to have written the plays of Shakespeare in the age of Shakespeare. Let me imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith,⁵ let us say. Shakespeare himself went, very probably—his mother was an heiress—to the grammar school, where he may have learnt Latin—Ovid, Virgil and Horace—and the elements of grammar and logic. He was, it is well known, a wild boy who poached rabbits, perhaps shot a deer, and had, rather sooner than he should have done, to marry a woman in the neighbourhood, who bore him a child rather quicker than was right. That escapade sent him to seek his fortune in London. He had, it seemed, a taste for the theatre; he began by holding horses at the stage door. Very soon he got work in the theatre, became a successful actor, and lived at the hub of the universe, meeting everybody, knowing everybody, practising his art on the boards, exercising his wits in the streets, and even getting access to the palace of the queen. Meanwhile his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was. But she was not sent to school. She had no

chance of learning grammar and logic, let alone of reading Horace and Virgil. She picked up a book now and then, one of her brother's perhaps, and read a few pages. But then her parents came in and told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved their daughter—indeed, more likely than not she was the apple of her father's eye. Perhaps she scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them. Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighbouring wool-stapler.⁶ She cried out that marriage was hateful to her, and for that she was severely beaten by her father. Then he ceased to scold her. He begged her instead not to hurt him, not to shame him in this matter of her marriage. He would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat, he said; and there were tears in his eyes. How could she disobey him? How could she break his heart? The force of her own gift alone drove her to it. She made up a small parcel of her belongings, let herself down by a rope one summer's night and took the road to London. She was not seventeen. The birds that sang in the hedge were not more musical than she was. She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother's, for the tune of words. Like him, she had a taste for the theatre. She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager—a fat, loose-lipped man—guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting—no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. He hinted—you can imagine what. She could get no training in her craft. Could she even seek her dinner in a tavern or roam the streets at midnight? Yet her genius was for fiction and lusted to feed abundantly upon the lives of men and women and the study of their ways. At last—for she was very young, oddly like Shakespeare the poet in her face, with the same grey eyes and rounded brows—at last Nick Greene the actor-manager took pity on her; she found herself with child by that gentleman and so—who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught

and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle.⁷

That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius. But for my part, I agree with the deceased bishop, if such he was—it is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius. For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people. It was not born in England among the Saxons and the Britons. It is not born today among the working classes. How, then, could it have been born among women whose work began, according to Professor Trevelyan, almost before they were out of the nursery, who were forced to it by their parents and held to it by all the power of law and custom? Yet genius of a sort must have existed among women as it must have existed among the working classes. Now and again an Emily Brontë or a Robert Burns⁸ blazes out and proves its presence. But certainly it never got itself on to paper. When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious⁹ Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to. Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. It was a woman Edward Fitzgerald,¹ I think, suggested who made the ballads and the folk-songs, crooning them to her children, beguiling her spinning with them, or the length of the winter's night.

This may be true or it may be false—who can say?—but what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in

psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. No girl could have walked to London and stood at a stage door and forced her way into the presence of actor-managers without doing herself a violence and suffering an anguish which may have been irrational—for chastity may be a fetish invented by certain societies for unknown reasons—but were none the less inevitable. Chastity had then, it has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage of the rarest. To have lived a free life in London in the sixteenth century would have meant for a woman who was poet and playwright a nervous stress and dilemma which might well have killed her. Had she survived, whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination. And undoubtedly, I thought, looking at the shelf where there are no plays by women, her work would have gone unsigned. That refuge she would have sought certainly. It was the relic of the sense of chastity that dictated anonymity to women even so late as the nineteenth century. Currer Bell, George Eliot, George Sand,² all the victims of inner strife as their writings prove, sought ineffectively to veil themselves by using the name of a man. Thus they did homage to the convention, which if not implanted by the other sex was liberally encouraged by them (the chief glory of a woman is not to be talked of, said Pericles,³ himself a much-talked-of man), that publicity in women is detestable. Anonymity runs in their blood. The desire to be veiled still possesses them. They are not even now as concerned about the health of their fame as men are, and, speaking generally, will pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it, as Alf, Bert or Chas must do in obedience to their instinct, which murmurs if it sees a fine woman go by, or even a dog, *Ce chien est à moi.*⁴ And, of course, it may not be a dog, I thought, remembering Parliament Square, the

Sieges Allee⁵ and other avenues; it may be a piece of land or a man with curly black hair. It is one of the great advantages of being a woman that one can pass even a very fine negress without wishing to make an Englishwoman of her.

That woman, then, who was born with a gift of poetry in the sixteenth century, was an unhappy woman, a woman at strife against herself. All the conditions of her life, all her own instincts, were hostile to the state of mind which is needed to set free whatever is in the brain. But what is the state of mind that is most propitious to the act of creation, I asked. Can one come by any notion of the state that furthers and makes possible that strange activity? Here I opened the volume containing the Tragedies of Shakespeare. What was Shakespeare's state of mind, for instance, when he wrote *Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*? It was certainly the state of mind most favourable to poetry that there has ever existed. But Shakespeare himself said nothing about it. We only know casually and by chance that he "never blotted a line."⁶ Nothing indeed was ever said by the artist himself about his state of mind until the eighteenth century perhaps. Rousseau⁷ perhaps began it. At any rate, by the nineteenth century self-consciousness had developed so far that it was the habit for men of letters to describe their minds in confessions and autobiographies. Their lives also were written, and their letters were printed after their deaths. Thus, though we do not know what Shakespeare went through when he wrote *Lear*, we do know what Carlyle went through when he wrote the *French Revolution*; what Flaubert went through when he wrote *Madame Bovary*; what Keats was going through when he tried to write poetry against the coming of death and the indifference of the world.

And one gathers from this enormous modern literature of confession and self-analysis that to write a work of genius is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty. Everything is against the likelihood that it will come from the writer's mind whole and entire. Generally material circumstances are against it. Dogs will bark; people will interrupt; money must be made; health will break down.

Further, accentuating all these difficulties and making them harder to bear is the world's notorious indifference. It does not ask people to write poems and novels and histories; it does not need them. It does not care whether Flaubert finds the right word or whether Carlyle⁸ scrupulously verifies this or that fact. Naturally, it will not pay for what it does not want. And so the writer, Keats,⁹ Flaubert, Carlyle, suffers, especially in the creative years of youth, every form of distraction and discouragement. A curse, a cry of agony, rises from those books of analysis and confession. "Mighty poets in their misery dead"¹—that is the burden of their song. If anything comes through in spite of all this, it is a miracle, and probably no book is born entire and uncrippled as it was conceived.

But for women, I thought, looking at the empty shelves, these difficulties were infinitely more formidable. In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since her pin money, which depended on the good will of her father, was only enough to keep her clothed, she was debarred from such alleviations as came even to Keats or Tennyson² or Carlyle, all poor men, from a walking tour, a little journey to France, from the separate lodging which, even if it were miserable enough, sheltered them from the claims and tyrannies of their families. Such material difficulties were formidable; but much worse were the immaterial. The indifference of the world which Keats and Flaubert and other men of genius have found so hard to bear was in her case not indifference but hostility. The world did not say to her as it said to them, Write if you choose; it makes no difference to me. The world said with a guffaw, Write? What's the good of your writing?

* * *

Young women, I would say, and please attend, for the peroration is beginning, you are, in my opinion, disgracefully ignorant. You have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never

shaken an empire or led an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you, and you have never introduced a barbarous race to the blessings of civilisation. What is your excuse? It is all very well for you to say, pointing to the streets and squares and forests of the globe swarming with black and white and coffee-coloured inhabitants, all busily engaged in traffic and enterprise and love-making, we have had other work on our hands. Without our doing, those seas would be unsailed and those fertile lands a desert. We have borne and bred and washed and taught, perhaps to the age of six or seven years, the one thousand six hundred and twenty-three million human beings who are, according to statistics, at present in existence, and that, allowing that some had help, takes time.

There is truth in what you say—I will not deny it. But at the same time may I remind you that there have been at least two colleges for women in existence in England since the year 1866; that after the year 1880 a married woman was allowed by law to possess her own property; and that in 1919—which is a whole nine years ago—she was given a vote? May I also remind you that the most of the professions have been open to you for close on ten years now? When you reflect upon these immense privileges and the length of time during which they have been enjoyed, and the fact that there must be at this moment some two thousand women capable of earning over five hundred a year in one way or another, you will agree that the excuse of lack of opportunity, training, encouragement, leisure and money no longer holds good. Moreover, the economists are telling us that Mrs Seton has had too many children. You must, of course, go on bearing children, but, so they say, in twos and threes, not in tens and twelves.

Thus, with some time on your hands and with some book learning in your brains—you have had enough of the other kind, and are sent to college partly, I suspect, to be uneducated—surely you should embark upon another stage of your very long, very laborious and highly obscure career. A thousand pens are ready to suggest what you should do and what effect you will have. My own

suggestion is a little fantastic, I admit; I prefer, therefore, to put it in the form of fiction.

I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister; but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee's³ life of the poet. She died young—alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle. Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the crossroads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her. For my belief is that if we live another century or so—I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals—and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves; if we look past Milton's bogey,⁴ for no human being should shut out the view; if we face the fact, for it is a fact, that there is no arm to cling to, but that we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while.

Endnotes

- Note 1: The selection is drawn from [chapter 3](#) and from the conclusion to the final chapter. In [chapter 2](#), Woolf has been to the library of the British Museum, trying in vain to find answers to questions about the different fates of men and women. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: G. M. Trevelyan's *History of England* (1926) long held its place as the standard one-volume history of the country. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, during the reign of the British house of Stuart (1603–49, 1660–1714). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
 "The ideal family life of the period [1640–50] that ended in such tragic political division has been recorded once for all in the *Memoirs of the Verney Family*" (Trevelyan, *History of England*). Lucy Hutchinson (1620–after 1675) wrote the biography of her husband, Col. John Hutchinson (1615–1664); it was first published in 1806.
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: These three Shakespearean heroines are, respectively, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, and *As You Like It*. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:
 Characters in, respectively, Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*; Sophocles' *Antigone*; Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth*; Racine's *Phèdre*; Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, *As You Like It*, and *Othello*; Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*; Congreve's *Way of the World*; Richardson's *Clarissa*; Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*; Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*; Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; and Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*).

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8:
“It remains a strange and almost inexplicable fact that in Athena’s city, where women were kept in almost Oriental suppression as odalisques or drudges, the stage should yet have produced figures like Clytemnestra and Cassandra, Atossa and Antigone, Phèdre and Medea, and all the other heroines who dominate play after play of the ‘misogynist’ Euripides. But the paradox of this world where in real life a respectable woman could hardly show her face alone in the street, and yet on the stage woman equals or surpasses man, has never been satisfactorily explained. In modern tragedy the same predominance exists. At all events, a very cursory survey of Shakespeare’s work (similarly with Webster, though not with Marlowe or Jonson) suffices to reveal how this dominance, this initiative of women, persists from Rosalind to Lady Macbeth. So too in Racine; six of his tragedies bear their heroines’ names; and what male characters of his shall we set against Hermione and Andromaque, Bérénice and Roxane, Phèdre and Athalie? So again with Ibsen; what men shall we match with Solveig and Nora, Hedda and Hilda Wangel and Rebecca West?”—F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy*, pp. 114–15 [*Woolf’s note*].

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: John Aubrey (1626–1697), English writer, especially of short biographies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The two women’s colleges at Cambridge, where Woolf first delivered a version of *A Room of One’s Own*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: English novelist (1775–1817).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: American poet and fiction writer (1809–1849). Joanna Baillie: English poet and dramatist (1762–1851).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Poet and novelist (1787–1855), best known for sketches of country life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Shakespeare had a daughter named Judith.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: A stapler is a dealer in staple goods (that is, established goods in trade and marketing); hence a wool-stapler is a dealer in wool (one of the “staple” products of 16th-century England).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Suicides were buried at crossroads. The Elephant and Castle was a tavern south of the river Thames, where roads went off to different parts of southern England.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Scottish poet (1759–1796).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An echo of Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751), line 59: “Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest.”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Poet and translator (1809–1883).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Male pseudonyms, respectively, of Charlotte Brontë, Marian Evans, and Amandine-Aurore-Lucie Dupin (1804–1876).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Athenian statesman (ca. 495–429 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: This dog is mine (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Avenue of Victory, a busy thoroughfare in Berlin. “Parliament Square”: London intersection.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ben Jonson, *Timber* (1640): “I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), early Romantic French (Swiss-born) philosopher and memoirist.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Scottish writer and historian. Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880), French novelist who believed the literary artist should find “the right word” (*le mot juste*).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: John Keats (1795–1821), English poet.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: From William Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence” (1807), line 116.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), English poet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Biographer and Shakespeare scholar (1859–1926), author of *Life of William Shakespeare* (1898).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Milton's unhappy first marriage, his campaign for freedom of divorce, and his deliberate subordination of Eve to Adam in *Paradise Lost*.[Return to reference 4](#)

Professions for Women¹

When your secretary invited me to come here, she told me that your Society is concerned with the employment of women and she suggested that I might tell you something about my own professional experiences. It is true I am a woman; it is true I am employed; but what professional experiences have I had? It is difficult to say. My profession is literature; and in that profession there are fewer experiences for women than in any other, with the exception of the stage—fewer, I mean, that are peculiar to women. For the road was cut many years ago—by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau,² by Jane Austen, by George Eliot—many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps. Thus, when I came to write, there were very few material obstacles in my way. Writing was a reputable and harmless occupation. The family peace was not broken by the scratching of a pen. No demand was made upon the family purse. For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare—if one has a mind that way. Pianos and models, Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, masters and mistresses, are not needed by a writer. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in the other professions.

But to tell you my story—it is a simple one. You have only got to figure to yourselves a girl in a bedroom with a pen in her hand. She had only to move that pen from left to right—from ten o'clock to one. Then it occurred to her to do what is simple and cheap enough after all—to slip a few of those pages into an envelope, fix a penny stamp in the corner, and drop the envelope into the red box at the corner. It was thus that I became a journalist; and my effort was rewarded on the first day of the following month—a very glorious

day it was for me—by a letter from an editor containing a cheque for one pound ten shillings and sixpence. But to show you how little I deserve to be called a professional woman, how little I know of the struggles and difficulties of such lives, I have to admit that instead of spending that sum upon bread and butter, rent, shoes and stockings, or butcher's bills, I went out and bought a cat—a beautiful cat, a Persian cat, which very soon involved me in bitter disputes with my neighbours.

What could be easier than to write articles and to buy Persian cats with the profits? But wait a moment. Articles have to be about something. Mine, I seem to remember, was about a novel by a famous man. And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, *The Angel in the House*.³ It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her—you may not know what I mean by *The Angel in the House*. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: 'My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has

been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.' And she made as if to guide my pen. I now record the one act for which I take some credit to myself, though the credit rightly belongs to some excellent ancestors of mine who left me a certain sum of money—shall we say five hundred pounds a year?—so that it was not necessary for me to depend solely on charm for my living. I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must—to put it bluntly—tell lies if they are to succeed. Thus, whenever I felt the shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the inkpot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had despatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe; it took much time that had better have been spent upon learning Greek grammar; or in roaming the world in search of adventures. But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.

But to continue my story. The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object—a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is 'herself'? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that

you know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill. That indeed is one of the reasons why I have come here—out of respect for you, who are in process of showing us by your experiments what a woman is, who are in process of providing us, by your failures and successes, with that extremely important piece of information.

But to continue the story of my professional experiences. I made one pound ten and six by my first review; and I bought a Persian cat with the proceeds. Then I grew ambitious. A Persian cat is all very well, I said; but a Persian cat is not enough. I must have a motor-car. And it was thus that I became a novelist—for it is a very strange thing that people will give you a motor-car if you will tell them a story. It is a still stranger thing that there is nothing so delightful in the world as telling stories. It is far pleasanter than writing reviews of famous novels. And yet, if I am to obey your secretary and tell you my professional experiences as a novelist, I must tell you about a very strange experience that befell me as a novelist. And to understand it you must try first to imagine a novelist's state of mind. I hope I am not giving away professional secrets if I say that a novelist's chief desire is to be as unconscious as possible. He has to induce in himself a state of perpetual lethargy. He wants life to proceed with the utmost quiet and regularity. He wants to see the same faces, to read the same books, to do the same things day after day, month after month, while he is writing, so that nothing may break the illusion in which he is living—so that nothing may disturb or disquiet the mysterious nosings about, feelings round, darts, dashes, and sudden discoveries of that very shy and illusive spirit, the imagination. I suspect that this state is the same both for men and women. Be that as it may, I want you to imagine me writing a novel in a state of trance. I want you to figure to yourselves a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the inkpot. The image that comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the

water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused from her dream. She was indeed in a state of the most acute and difficult distress. To speak without figure, she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers—they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realize or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women.

These then were two very genuine experiences of my own. These were two of the adventures of my professional life. The first—killing the Angel in the House—I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful—and yet they are very difficult to define. Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. And if this is so in literature, the freest of all professions for

women, how is it in the new professions which you are now for the first time entering?

Those are the questions that I should like, had I time, to ask you. And indeed, if I have laid stress upon these professional experiences of mine, it is because I believe that they are, though in different forms, yours also. Even when the path is nominally open—when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way. To discuss and define them is I think of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved. But besides this, it is necessary also to discuss the ends and the aims for which we are fighting, for which we are doing battle with these formidable obstacles. Those aims cannot be taken for granted; they must be perpetually questioned and examined. The whole position, as I see it—here in this hall surrounded by women practising for the first time in history I know not how many different professions—is one of extraordinary interest and importance. You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men. You are able, though not without great labour and effort, to pay the rent. You are earning your five hundred pounds a year. But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms? These, I think are questions of the utmost importance and interest. For the first time in history you are able to ask them; for the first time you are able to decide for yourselves what the answers should be. Willingly would I stay and discuss those questions and answers—but not tonight. My time is up; and I must cease.

1942

Endnotes

- Note 1: A paper read to the Women's Service League [*Woolf's note*]. Woolf here echoes her points in *A Room of One's Own* about a woman's needing money (specifically, an annual income of five hundred British pounds) and a room in which to write.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Economist, moralist, journalist, and novelist (1802–1876). Burney (1752–1840), author of *Evelina* and other novels. Behn (1640–1689), writer of romances and plays.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: By Coventry Patmore (1823–1896), published 1854–62.[Return to reference 3](#)

JAMES JOYCE

1882–1941

James Joyce was born in Dublin, son of a talented but feckless father, who is accurately described in Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) as having been "a medical student, an oarsman, a tenor, an amateur actor, a shouting politician, a small landlord, a small investor, a drinker, a good fellow, a storyteller, somebody's secretary, something in a distillery, a tax-gatherer, a bankrupt, and at present a praiser of his own past." The elder Joyce, like the father in Joyce's novel, drifted steadily down the financial and social scale, his family moving from house to house, each one less genteel and more shabby than the previous. James Joyce's primary education was Catholic, from the age of six to the age of nine at Clongowes Wood College and from eleven to sixteen at Belvedere College, as vividly recalled in *A Portrait of the Artist*. Both were Jesuit institutions and were conventional roads to the priesthood. He then studied modern languages at University College, Dublin.

From a comparatively young age Joyce regarded himself as a rebel against the shabbiness and philistinism of Dublin. In his last year of school at Belvedere he began to reject his Catholic faith in favor of a literary mission that he saw as involving rebellion and exile. He refused to play any part in the nationalist or other popular activities of his fellow students, and he created some stir by his outspoken articles, one of which, on the Norwegian playwright

Henrik Ibsen, appeared in London's *Fortnightly Review* when Joyce was eighteen. He taught himself Dano-Norwegian in order to read Ibsen and to write to him. When, on instructions of the faculty adviser, an article by Joyce, significantly titled "The Day of the Rabblement," was refused by the student magazine that had commissioned it, he had it printed privately. By 1902, when he received his B.A. degree, the young man was already committed to a career as exile and writer. For Joyce, as for his character Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Ulysses*, being a writer necessarily implied a self-imposed state of exile. To preserve his integrity, to avoid involvement in popular causes, to devote himself to the life of the artist, he felt that he had to go abroad.



Dublin ca. 1899. Sackville Street, renamed O'Connell Street in 1924, was and still is the grand main street in Dublin. After he left for the Continent, Joyce imaginatively populated the city with such fictional characters as Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom. In Joyce's time, as seen in this picture, Dublin bustled with pedestrians, horse-drawn carriages, electric trams, and automobiles. Also visible are monuments to the British

colonial system, most prominently Nelson's Pillar, dedicated in 1809 to the British naval hero Horatio Nelson and destroyed in 1966 by Irish republicans.

Joyce went to Paris after graduation, was recalled to Dublin by his mother's fatal illness, had a short spell there as a schoolteacher, then returned to the Continent in 1904 to teach English in Trieste and then in Zurich. He took with him Nora Barnacle, a woman from Galway with no interest in literature; her vivacity and wit charmed Joyce, and the two lived in devoted companionship until his death, although they were not married until 1931. In 1920 Joyce and Barnacle settled in Paris, where they lived until December 1940, when the war forced them to take refuge in Switzerland; he died in Zurich a few weeks later.

Proud, obstinate, absolutely convinced of his genius, given to fits of sudden gaiety and of sudden silence, Joyce was not always an easy person to get along with, yet he never lacked friends, and throughout his thirty-six years on the Continent he was always the center of a literary circle. Life was hard at first. In Trieste he had little money, and he did not improve matters by drinking heavily, a habit checked somewhat by his brother Stanislaus, who came out from Dublin to act (as Stanislaus put it much later) as his "brother's keeper." Joyce also suffered from eye diseases and, blind for brief periods, underwent twenty-five operations. In 1917 Edith Rockefeller McCormick and then the lawyer John Quinn, steered in Joyce's direction by Ezra Pound, helped out financially. A benefactor who would prove to be permanent was the English feminist and editor Harriet Shaw Weaver, who not only subsidized Joyce generously from 1917 to the end of his life but also occupied herself indefatigably with arrangements for publishing his work.

In spite of doing most of his writing in Trieste, Zurich, and Paris, Joyce paradoxically wrote only and always about Dublin. No writer has ever been more soaked in Dublin—its atmosphere, its history, its topography. He devised ways of expanding his accounts of the Irish

capital, however, so that they became microcosms of human history, geography, and experience.

Joyce began his career by writing a series of stories that etched, with extraordinary clarity, aspects of Dublin life. These stories—published as *Dubliners* in 1914—are sharp, realistic sketches of what Joyce called the “paralysis” that beset the lives of people in then-provincial Ireland. The language is crisp, lucid, and detached, and the details are chosen and organized so meticulously that their symbolic meanings intensify as the events and images intersect. Some of the stories, such as “Araby,” are built around what Joyce called an “epiphany,” a dramatic but fleeting moment of revelation about the self or the world. Others, like “Clay,” withhold key bits of information to capture the perceptions and often misapprehensions of a vulnerable main character. Many end abruptly, without conventional narrative closure, or they lack overt connectives and transitions, leaving multiple possibilities in suspension. The last story in *Dubliners*, “The Dead,” was not part of the original draft of the book but was added later, when Joyce was preoccupied with the nature of artistic objectivity. At a festive event, attended by guests whose portraits Joyce draws with precision and economy, a series of jolting events frees the protagonist, Gabriel, from his possessiveness and egotism. The view he attains at the end is the mood of supreme neutrality that Joyce saw as the beginning of artistic awareness. It is the view of art developed by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist*.

Dubliners represents Joyce’s first phase, in which he came to terms with the life he had rejected. Next he had to come to terms with the meaning of his emergence as a man dedicated to imaginative writing; the result was a novel about the youth and development of an artist, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Joyce wove his autobiography into a work of fiction so finely chiseled and arranged, so stripped of anything superfluous, that each word contributes to the presentation of the theme: the parallel movement toward art and toward exile. A part of his first draft was published posthumously under the original title, *Stephen Hero* (1944), and a comparison between it and the final version, *A Portrait*

of the Artist, shows the precision with which Joyce reworked and compressed his material for maximum effect.

From the beginning, Joyce had trouble getting his writing into print. The release of *Dubliners* was held up for many years while he fought with both English and Irish editors about words and phrases that they wished to eliminate. Censorship cuts were made to *A Portrait of the Artist* when it was first issued, in serial form, and three European publishers rejected it before it was finally accepted by an American firm. Joyce's next novel, *Ulysses* (1922), was published in Paris by Sylvia Beach and immediately banned in Britain and America; its earlier serialization in an American magazine, *The Little Review* (March 1918–December 1920), had been stopped abruptly when the U.S. Post Office brought a charge of obscenity against the work. Fortunately Judge John Woolsey's history-making decision in a federal district court on December 6, 1933, resulted in the lifting of the ban and the free circulation of *Ulysses*, first in America and soon afterward in Britain.

Ulysses is an account of one day in the lives of Dubliners; it thus describes a limited number of events involving a limited number of people in a limited environment. Yet Joyce's ambition—which took him seven years to realize—is to give the events the depth and implication that can convey symbolic significance. The episodes in *Ulysses* correspond to incidents in Homer's ancient Greek epic *Odyssey*, although the Homeric names customarily given to the episodes, such as "Proteus," "Circe," and "Penelope," appear not in the book but in Joyce's schematic outline. Joyce regarded Odysseus, or Ulysses, as the most "complete" man in literature, shown in all his aspects—coward and hero, cautious and reckless, weak and strong, husband and philanderer, father and son, dignified and ridiculous; so he makes his hero, Leopold Bloom, an Irish Jew, into a modern Ulysses. The parallels between the Homeric archetypes and the modern-day characters and events create a host of interpretive complexities. They can seem tight or loose, deflating or ennobling, ironic or heroic, epic or mock-epic, depending on their specific application in a particular episode and, to some extent, on the propensities of the reader.

Joyce's final work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939), took more than fourteen years to write, and Joyce considered it his masterpiece, though some readers have found its dense, multilayered language impenetrable. For this work, Joyce invents a dream language in which words are combined, distorted, created from bits of other words fitted together, several meanings at once, often drawn from several languages, and fused in conveying a variety of ways to achieve whole clusters of meaning simultaneously. In *Ulysses* Joyce had made the symbolic aspect of the novel at least as important as the realistic aspect, but in *Finnegans Wake* he gave up realism altogether. This vast story of a symbolic Irishman's cosmic dream develops, by enormous reverberating puns, a continuous expansion of meaning, the elements in the puns deriving from every conceivable source in history, literature, mythology, and Joyce's personal experience.

Like his other novels, *Finnegans Wake* put Joyce's consummate craftsmanship at the service of a humanely comic vision. His innovations in organization, style, and narrative technique have influenced countless writers, but his works of fiction are unique.

Araby¹

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School² set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*,³ I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gantlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street light from the kitchen windows had

filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed and I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you*⁴ about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of

my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: *O love! O love!* many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*.⁵ I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar, she said; she would love to go.

—And why can't you? I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent.⁶ Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

—It's well for you, she said.

—If I go, I said, I will bring you something.

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised and hoped it was

not some Freemason affair.⁷ I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly:

—Yes, boy, I know.

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I left the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high cold empty gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old garrulous woman, a pawn-broker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs Mercer stood up to go: she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

—I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord.

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the halldoor. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

—The people are in bed and after their first sleep now, he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

—Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is.

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*. He asked me where I was going and, when I had told him a second time he asked me did I know *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed*.⁸ When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin⁹ tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous houses and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girdled at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized

a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words *Café Chantant*¹ were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

Remembering with difficulty why I had come I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

—O, I never said such a thing!

—O, but you did!

—O, but I didn't!

—Didn't she say that?

—Yes. I heard her.

—O, there's a . . . fib!

Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

—No, thank you.

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

Endnotes

- Note 1:
The third of the fifteen stories in *Dubliners*. This tale of the frustrated quest for beauty in the midst of drabness is both meticulously realistic in its handling of details of Dublin life and the Dublin scene, and also highly symbolic in that almost every image and incident suggests some particular aspect of the theme (for example, the suggestion of the Holy Grail in the image of the chalice, mentioned in the fifth paragraph). Joyce was drawing on his own childhood recollections, and the uncle in the story is a reminiscence of Joyce's father. But in all the stories in *Dubliners* dealing with childhood, the child lives not with his parents but with an uncle and aunt—a symbol of that isolation and lack of proper relation between “consubstantial” (in the flesh) parents and children that is a major theme in Joyce's work.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Joyce family moved to 17 North Richmond Street, Dublin, in 1894; and Joyce had earlier briefly attended the Christian Brothers' school a few doors away (the Christian Brothers are a Catholic religious community). The details of the house described here correspond exactly to those of number 17. “Blind”: that is, it was a dead-end street.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: François Eugène Vidocq (1775–1857) had an extraordinary career as soldier, thief, chief of the French detective force, and private detective. *The Abbot* is a historical novel dealing with Mary, Queen of Scots. *The Devout Communicant* is a Catholic religious manual.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Street ballad, so called from its opening words. This one was about the 19th-century Irish nationalist Jeremiah Donovan, popularly known as O'Donovan Rossa.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The bazaar, described by its “official catalogue” as a “Grand Oriental Fête,” was actually held in Dublin on May 14–19, 1894.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, her convent school. “Retreat”: period of seclusion from ordinary activities devoted to religious exercises.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: His aunt shares her church’s distrust of the Freemasons, an old European secret society, reputedly anti-Catholic.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Once-popular sentimental poem by Caroline Norton.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A silver coin, now obsolete, worth two shillings.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Singing café (French; literal trans.); a café that provided musical entertainment, popular early in the 20th century.[Return to reference 1](#)

Clay¹

The matron² had given her leave to go out as soon as the women's tea was over and Maria looked forward to her evening out. The kitchen was spick and span: the cook said you could see yourself in the big copper boilers. The fire was nice and bright and on one of the side-tables were four very big barmbracks.³ These barmbracks seemed uncut; but if you went closer you would see that they had been cut into long thick even slices and were ready to be handed round at tea. Maria had cut them herself.

Maria was a very, very small person indeed but she had a very long nose and a very long chin. She talked a little through her nose, always soothingly: "*Yes, my dear,*" and "*No, my dear.*" She was always sent for when the women quarrelled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace. One day the matron had said to her:

"Maria, you are a veritable peace-maker!"

And the sub-matron and two of the Board ladies⁴ had heard the compliment. And Ginger Mooney was always saying what she wouldn't do to the dummy⁵ who had charge of the irons if it wasn't for Maria. Everyone was so fond of Maria.

The women would have their tea at six o'clock and she would be able to get away before seven. From Ballsbridge to the Pillar, twenty minutes; from the Pillar to Drumcondra,⁶ twenty minutes; and twenty minutes to buy the things. She would be there before eight. She took out her purse with the silver clasps and read again the words *A Present from Belfast*.⁷ She was very fond of that purse because Joe had brought it to her five years before when he and Alphy had gone to Belfast on a Whit-Monday⁸ trip. In the purse were two half-crowns and some coppers.⁹ She would have five shillings clear after paying tram fare. What a nice evening they would have,

all the children singing! Only she hoped that Joe wouldn't come in drunk. He was so different when he took any drink.

Often he had wanted her to go and live with them; but she would have felt herself in the way (though Joe's wife was ever so nice with her) and she had become accustomed to the life of the laundry. Joe was a good fellow. She had nursed¹ him and Alphy too; and Joe used often say:

"Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother."

After the break-up at home the boys had got her that position in the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry, and she liked it. She used to have such a bad opinion of Protestants but now she thought they were very nice people, a little quiet and serious, but still very nice people to live with. Then she had her plants in the conservatory and she liked looking after them. She had lovely ferns and wax-plants and, whenever anyone came to visit her, she always gave the visitor one or two slips² from her conservatory. There was one thing she didn't like and that was the tracts³ on the walks; but the matron was such a nice person to deal with, so genteel.

When the cook told her everything was ready she went into the women's room and began to pull the big bell. In a few minutes the women began to come in by twos and threes, wiping their steaming hands in their petticoats and pulling down the sleeves of their blouses over their red steaming arms.⁴ They settled down before their huge mugs which the cook and the dummy filled up with hot tea, already mixed with milk and sugar in huge tin cans. Maria superintended the distribution of the barmbrack and saw that every woman got her four slices. There was a great deal of laughing and joking during the meal. Lizzie Fleming said Maria was sure to get the ring and, though Fleming had said that for so many Hallow Eves,⁵ Maria had to laugh and say she didn't want any ring or man either; and when she laughed her grey-green eyes sparkled with disappointed shyness and the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin. Then Ginger Mooney lifted up her mug of tea and proposed Maria's health while all the other women clattered with their mugs on the table, and said she was sorry she hadn't a sup of porter to

drink it in. And Maria laughed again till the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin and till her minute body nearly shook itself asunder because she knew that Mooney meant well though, of course, she had the notions of a common woman.

But wasn't Maria glad when the women had finished their tea and the cook and the dummy had begun to clear away the tea-things! She went into her little bedroom and, remembering that the next morning was a mass morning,⁶ changed the hand of the alarm from seven to six. Then she took off her working skirt and her house-boots and laid her best skirt out on the bed and her tiny dress-boots beside the foot of the bed. She changed her blouse too and, as she stood before the mirror, she thought of how she used to dress for mass on Sunday morning when she was a young girl; and she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body.

When she got outside the streets were shining with rain and she was glad of her old brown waterproof. The tram was full and she had to sit on the little stool at the end of the car, facing all the people, with her toes barely touching the floor. She arranged in her mind all she was going to do and thought how much better it was to be independent and to have your own money in your pocket. She hoped they would have a nice evening. She was sure they would but she could not help thinking what a pity it was Alphy and Joe were not speaking. They were always falling out now but when they were boys together they used to be the best of friends: but such was life.

She got out of her tram at the Pillar and ferreted her way quickly among the crowds. She went into Downes's cake-shop⁷ but the shop was so full of people that it was a long time before she could get herself attended to. She bought a dozen of mixed penny cakes, and at last came out of the shop laden with a big bag. Then she thought what else would she buy: she wanted to buy something really nice. They would be sure to have plenty of apples and nuts. It was hard to know what to buy and all she could think of was cake. She decided to buy some plumcake but Downes's plumcake had not

enough almond icing on top of it so she went over to a shop in Henry Street.⁸ Here she was a long time in suiting herself and the stylish young lady behind the counter, who was evidently a little annoyed by her, asked her was it wedding-cake she wanted to buy. That made Maria blush and smile at the young lady; but the young lady took it all very seriously and finally cut a thick slice of plumcake, parcelled it up and said:

"Two-and-four, please."⁹

She thought she would have to stand in the Drumcondra tram because none of the young men seemed to notice her but an elderly gentleman made room for her. He was a stout gentleman and he wore a brown hard hat; he had a square red face and a greyish moustache. Maria thought he was a colonel-looking gentleman and she reflected how much more polite he was than the young men who simply stared straight before them. The gentleman began to chat with her about Hallow Eve and the rainy weather. He supposed the bag was full of good things for the little ones and said it was only right that the youngsters should enjoy themselves while they were young. Maria agreed with him and favoured him with demure nods and hems. He was very nice with her, and when she was getting out at the Canal Bridge she thanked him and bowed, and he bowed to her and raised his hat and smiled agreeably; and while she was going up along the terrace, bending her tiny head under the rain, she thought how easy it was to know a gentleman even when he has a drop taken.¹

Everybody said: "*O, here's Maria!*" when she came to Joe's house. Joe was there, having come home from business, and all the children had their Sunday dresses on. There were two big girls in from next door and games were going on. Maria gave the bag of cakes to the eldest boy, Alphy, to divide and Mrs. Donnelly said it was too good of her to bring such a big bag of cakes and made all the children say:

"Thanks, Maria."

But Maria said she had brought something special for papa and mamma, something they would be sure to like, and she began to

look for her plumcake. She tried in Downes's bag and then in the pockets of her waterproof and then on the hallstand but nowhere could she find it. Then she asked all the children had any of them eaten it—by mistake, of course—but the children all said no and looked as if they did not like to eat cakes if they were to be accused of stealing. Everybody had a solution for the mystery and Mrs. Donnelly said it was plain that Maria had left it behind her in the tram. Maria, remembering how confused the gentleman with the greyish moustache had made her, coloured with shame and vexation and disappointment. At the thought of the failure of her little surprise and of the two and four-pence she had thrown away for nothing she nearly cried outright.

But Joe said it didn't matter and made her sit down by the fire. He was very nice with her. He told her all that went on in his office, repeating for her a smart answer which he had made to the manager. Maria did not understand why Joe laughed so much over the answer he had made but she said that the manager must have been a very overbearing person to deal with. Joe said he wasn't so bad when you knew how to take him, that he was a decent sort so long as you didn't rub him the wrong way. Mrs. Donnelly played the piano for the children and they danced and sang. Then the two next-door girls handed round the nuts. Nobody could find the nutcrackers and Joe was nearly getting cross over it and asked how did they expect Maria to crack nuts without a nutcracker. But Maria said she didn't like nuts and that they weren't to bother about her. Then Joe asked would she take a bottle of stout and Mrs. Donnelly said there was port wine too in the house if she would prefer that. Maria said she would rather they didn't ask her to take anything: but Joe insisted.

So Maria let him have his way and they sat by the fire talking over old times and Maria thought she would put in a good word for Alphy. But Joe cried that God might strike him stone dead if ever he spoke a word to his brother again and Maria said she was sorry she had mentioned the matter. Mrs. Donnelly told her husband it was a great shame for him to speak that way of his own flesh and blood

but Joe said that Alphy was no brother of his and there was nearly being a row² on the head of it. But Joe said he would not lose his temper on account of the night it was and asked his wife to open some more stout. The two next-door girls had arranged some Hallow Eve games and soon everything was merry again. Maria was delighted to see the children so merry and Joe and his wife in such good spirits. The next-door girls put some saucers³ on the table and then led the children up to the table, blindfold. One got the prayer-book and the other three got the water;⁴ and when one of the next-door girls got the ring Mrs. Donnelly shook her finger at the blushing girl as much as to say: *O, I know all about it!* They insisted then on blindfolding Maria and leading her up to the table to see what she would get; and, while they were putting on the bandage, Maria laughed and laughed again till the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin.

They led her up to the table amid laughing and joking and she put her hand out in the air as she was told to do. She moved her hand about here and there in the air and descended on one of the saucers. She felt a soft wet substance⁵ with her fingers and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds; and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden, and at last Mrs. Donnelly said something very cross to one of the next-door girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it over again: and this time she got the prayer-book.

After that Mrs. Donnelly played Miss McCloud's Reel⁶ for the children and Joe made Maria take a glass of wine. Soon they were all quite merry again and Mrs. Donnelly said Maria would enter a convent before the year was out because she had got the prayer-book. Maria had never seen Joe so nice to her as he was that night, so full of pleasant talk and reminiscences. She said they were all very good to her.

At last the children grew tired and sleepy and Joe asked Maria would she not sing some little song before she went, one of the old

songs. Mrs. Donnelly said "*Do, please, Maria!*" and so Maria had to get up and stand beside the piano. Mrs. Donnelly bade the children be quiet and listen to Maria's song. Then she played the prelude and said "*Now, Maria!*" and Maria, blushing very much, began to sing in a tiny quavering voice. She sang *I Dreamt that I Dwelt*,⁷ and when she came to the second verse she sang again:

*"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls
With vassals and serfs at my side
And of all who assembled within those walls
That I was the hope and the pride.*

*"I had riches too great to count, could boast
Of a high ancestral name,
But I also dreamt, which pleased me most,
That you loved me still the same."*

But no one tried to show her her mistake;⁸ and when she had ended her song Joe was very much moved. He said that there was no time like the long ago and no music for him like poor old Balfe, whatever other people might say; and his eyes filled up so much with tears that he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was.

1914

Endnotes

- Note 1: The tenth of fifteen stories in *Dubliners*. "Clay" is the story of a middle-aged Catholic woman, Maria, who is unmarried and works as a maid in a Protestant charitable institution called *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry. Its religious affiliation and staff, which includes former sex workers, initially causes Maria concern about working there.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Female supervisor.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: A bread with raisins and associated with the holiday of Hallows Eve (Halloween).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Members of the governing board of the institution that manages the laundry.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Outdated and offensive term for a mentally impaired or mute person.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Suburb north of Dublin. "Ballsbridge:" wealthy suburb in southeast Dublin; the location of embassies and diplomatic offices.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Souvenir from Belfast, a majority Protestant city in Northern Ireland. "Pillar": Nelson's Pillar, a tall granite tower topped with a statue of British naval officer Horatio Nelson. It was located in the center of Dublin and a reminder of the British colonial presence.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Also known as Pentecost Monday, a public holiday in Ireland observed fifty days after Easter Sunday. It marks the end of the Easter cycle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Pence or pennies. "Half crown": British coin equal to two shillings and six pence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cared for.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Plant cuttings. "Wax plants:" plants with glossy leaves.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Scriptural verses intended as moral instruction for the women working in the laundry, especially those seeking penance for past behavior. An 1867 report from the historical *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry states its mission as "the eternal salvation of the unhappy ones who have been led captive by the devil, and have fallen through his devices."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Laundry was washed manually in this period by being stirred with paddles in heated tubs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Irish holiday that accords with Halloween in the United States. "Ring": a traditional Hallows Eve game in which objects are used to predict a player's future. A ring baked into a cake and found by a girl might predict marriage.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: All Saints Day, the day after Hallows Eve, was considered a Holy Day of Obligation on which Catholics must

- attend mass.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A bakery near Nelson's Pillar.[Return to reference 7](#)
 - Note 8: A popular shopping street on the north side of Dublin.[Return to reference 8](#)
 - Note 9: Two shillings, four pence, or about half the money in Maria's purse.[Return to reference 9](#)
 - Note 1: Tipsy or slightly drunk.[Return to reference 1](#)
 - Note 2: Argument.[Return to reference 2](#)
 - Note 3: Another divination game in which objects are placed under saucers. Chosen objects determine the player's future.[Return to reference 3](#)
 - Note 4: Predicts travel across the sea. "Prayer-book": predicts joining a convent.[Return to reference 4](#)
 - Note 5: Crucially unspecified by Joyce, but it is clay, which predicts an early death.[Return to reference 5](#)
 - Note 6: Traditional Irish dance set to lively music.[Return to reference 6](#)
 - Note 7: From the 19th-century opera *The Bohemian Girl* by Irish composer Michael Balfe with libretto by Alfred Bunn. The full title is *I Dreamt that I Dwelt in Marble Halls*.[Return to reference 7](#)
 - Note 8: Maria repeated the first verse instead of singing the second verse: "I dreamt that suitors sought my hand, / That knights, upon bended knee, / And with vows no maiden heart could withstand, / They pledg'd their faith to me. / And I dreamt that one of that noble host, / Came forth my heart to claim, / But I also dreamt, which charm'd me most, / That you lov'd me still the same."[Return to reference 8](#)

The Dead

Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the ground floor and helped him off with his overcoat than the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest. It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also. But Miss Kate and Miss Julia had thought of that and had converted the bathroom upstairs into a ladies' dressing-room. Miss Kate and Miss Julia were there, gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come.

It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members of Julia's choir, any of Kate's pupils that were grown up enough and even some of Mary Jane's pupils too. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style as long as anyone could remember; ever since Kate and Julia, after the death of their brother Pat, had left the house in Stoney Batter and taken Mary Jane, their only niece, to live with them in the dark gaunt house on Usher's Island, the upper part of which they had rented from Mr Fulham, the cornfactor¹ on the ground floor. That was a good thirty years ago if it was a day. Mary Jane, who was then a little girl in short clothes, was now the main prop of the household for she had the organ in Haddington Road.² She had been through the Academy and gave a pupils' concert every year in the upper room of the Antient Concert Rooms.³ Many of her pupils belonged to better-class families on the Kingstown and Dalkey line. Old as they were, her aunts also did their share. Julia, though she was quite grey, was still the leading soprano in Adam and Eve's, and Kate, being too feeble to go about much, gave music lessons to

beginners on the old square piano in the back room. Lily, the caretaker's daughter, did housemaid's work for them. Though their life was modest they believed in eating well; the best of everything: diamond-bone sirloins, three-shilling tea and the best bottled stout.⁴ But Lily seldom made a mistake in the orders so that she got on well with her three mistresses. They were fussy, that was all. But the only thing they would not stand was back answers.

Of course they had good reason to be fussy on such a night. And then it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign of Gabriel and his wife. Besides they were dreadfully afraid that Freddy Malins might turn up screwed.⁵ They would not wish for worlds that any of Mary Jane's pupils should see him under the influence; and when he was like that it was sometimes very hard to manage him. Freddy Malins always came late but they wondered what could be keeping Gabriel: and that was what brought them every two minutes to the banisters to ask Lily had Gabriel or Freddy come.

—O, Mr Conroy, said Lily to Gabriel when she opened the door for him, Miss Kate and Miss Julia thought you were never coming. Good-night, Mrs Conroy.

—I'll engage⁶ they did, said Gabriel, but they forget that my wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself.

He stood on the mat, scraping the snow from his goloshes, while Lily led his wife to the foot of the stairs and called out:

—Miss Kate, here's Mrs Conroy.

Kate and Julia came toddling down the dark stairs at once. Both of them kissed Gabriel's wife, said she must be perished alive and asked was Gabriel with her.

—Here I am as right as the mail, Aunt Kate! Go on up. I'll follow, called out Gabriel from the dark.

He continued scraping his feet vigorously while the three women went upstairs, laughing, to the ladies' dressing-room. A light fringe of snow lay like a cape on the shoulders of his overcoat and like toecaps on the toes of his goloshes; and, as the buttons of his overcoat slipped with a squeaking noise through the snow-stiffened

frieze,⁷ a cold fragrant air from out-of-doors escaped from crevices and folds.

—Is it snowing again, Mr Conroy? asked Lily.

She had preceded him into the pantry to help him off with his overcoat. Gabriel smiled at the three syllables she had given his surname and glanced at her. She was a slim, growing girl, pale in complexion and with hay-coloured hair. The gas in the pantry made her look still paler. Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll.

—Yes, Lily, he answered, and I think we're in for a night of it.

He looked up at the pantry ceiling, which was shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above, listened for a moment to the piano and then glanced at the girl, who was folding his overcoat carefully at the end of a shelf.

—Tell me, Lily, he said in a friendly tone, do you still go to school?

—O no, sir, she answered. I'm done schooling this year and more.

—O, then, said Gabriel gaily, I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?

The girl glanced back at him over her shoulder and said with great bitterness:

—The men that is now is only all palaver⁸ and what they can get out of you.

Gabriel coloured as if he felt he had made a mistake and, without looking at her, kicked off his goloshes and flicked actively with his muffler at his patent-leather shoes.

He was a stout tallish young man. The high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of pale red; and on his hairless face there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and the bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes. His glossy black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve

behind his ears where it curled slightly beneath the groove left by his hat.

When he had flicked lustre into his shoes he stood up and pulled his waistcoat down more tightly on his plump body. Then he took a coin rapidly from his pocket.

—O Lily, he said, thrusting it into her hands, it's Christmas-time, isn't it? Just . . . here's a little. . . .

He walked rapidly towards the door.

—O no, sir! cried the girl, following him. Really, sir, I wouldn't take it.

—Christmas-time! Christmas-time! said Gabriel, almost trotting to the stairs and waving his hand to her in deprecation.

The girl, seeing that he had gained the stairs, called out after him:

—Well, thank you, sir.

He waited outside the drawing-room door until the waltz should finish, listening to the skirts that swept against it and to the shuffling of feet. He was still discomposed by the girl's bitter and sudden retort. It had cast a gloom over him which he tried to dispel by arranging his cuffs and the bows of his tie. Then he took from his waistcoat pocket a little paper and glanced at the headings he had made for his speech. He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they could recognise from Shakespeare or from the Melodies⁹ would be better. The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure.

Just then his aunts and his wife came out of the ladies' dressing-room. His aunts were two small plainly dressed old women. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller. Her hair, drawn low over the tops

of her ears, was grey; and grey also, with darker shadows, was her large flaccid face. Though she was stout in build and stood erect her slow eyes and parted lips gave her the appearance of a woman who did not know where she was or where she was going. Aunt Kate was more vivacious. Her face, healthier than her sister's, was all puckers and creases, like a shrivelled red apple, and her hair, braided in the same old-fashioned way, had not lost its ripe nut colour.

They both kissed Gabriel frankly. He was their favourite nephew, the son of their dead elder sister, Ellen, who had married T. J. Conroy of the Port and Docks.¹

—Gretta tells me you're not going to take a cab back to Monkstown tonight, Gabriel, said Aunt Kate.

—No, said Gabriel, turning to his wife, we had quite enough of that last year, hadn't we? Don't you remember, Aunt Kate, what a cold Gretta got out of it? Cab windows rattling all the way, and the east wind blowing in after we passed Mention. Very jolly it was. Gretta caught a dreadful cold.

Aunt Kate frowned severely and nodded her head at every word.

—Quite right, Gabriel, quite right, she said. You can't be too careful.

—But as for Gretta there, said Gabriel, she'd walk home in the snow if she were let.

Mrs Conroy laughed.

—Don't mind him, Aunt Kate, she said. He's really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom's eyes at night and making him do the dumb-bells, and forcing Eva to eat the stirabout.² The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it! . . . O, but you'll never guess what he makes me wear now!

She broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband, whose admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair. The two aunts laughed heartily too, for Gabriel's solicitude was a standing joke with them.

—Goloshes! said Mrs Conroy. That's the latest. Whenever it's wet underfoot I must put on my goloshes. To-night even he wanted me

to put them on, but I wouldn't. The next thing he'll buy me will be a diving suit.

Gabriel laughed nervously and patted his tie reassuringly while Aunt Kate nearly doubled herself, so heartily did she enjoy the joke. The smile soon faded from Aunt Julia's face and her mirthless eyes were directed towards her nephew's face. After a pause she asked:

—And what are goloshes, Gabriel?

—Goloshes, Julia! exclaimed her sister. Goodness me, don't you know what goloshes are? You wear them over your . . . over your boots, Gretta, isn't it?

—Yes, said Mrs Conroy. Guttapercha³ things. We both have a pair now. Gabriel says everyone wears them on the continent.

—O, on the continent, murmured Aunt Julia, nodding her head slowly.

Gabriel knitted his brows and said, as if he were slightly angered:

—It's nothing very wonderful but Gretta thinks it very funny because she says the word reminds her of Christy Minstrels.⁴

—But tell me, Gabriel, said Aunt Kate, with brisk tact. Of course, you've seen about the room. Gretta was saying . . .

—O, the room is all right, replied Gabriel. I've taken one in the Gresham.⁵

—To be sure, said Aunt Kate, by far the best thing to do. And the children, Gretta, you're not anxious about them?

—O, for one night, said Mrs Conroy. Besides, Bessie will look after them.

—To be sure, said Aunt Kate again. What a comfort it is to have a girl like that, one you can depend on! There's that Lily, I'm sure I don't know what has come over her lately. She's not the girl she was at all.

Gabriel was about to ask his aunt some questions on this point but she broke off suddenly to gaze after her sister who had wandered down the stairs and was craning her neck over the banisters.

—Now, I ask you, she said, almost testily, where is Julia going? Julia! Julia! Where are you going?

Julia, who had gone halfway down one flight, came back and announced blandly:

—Here's Freddy.

At the same moment a clapping of hands and a final flourish of the pianist told that the waltz had ended. The drawing-room door was opened from within and some couples came out. Aunt Kate drew Gabriel aside hurriedly and whispered into his ear:

—Slip down, Gabriel, like a good fellow and see if he's all right, and don't let him up if he's screwed. I'm sure he's screwed. I'm sure he is.

Gabriel went to the stairs and listened over the banisters. He could hear two persons talking in the pantry. Then he recognised Freddy Malins' laugh. He went down the stairs noisily.

—It's such a relief, said Aunt Kate to Mrs Conroy, that Gabriel is here. I always feel easier in my mind when he's here. . . . Julia, there's Miss Daly and Miss Power will take some refreshment. Thanks for your beautiful waltz, Miss Daly. It made lovely time.

A tall wizen-faced man, with a stiff grizzled moustache and swarthy skin, who was passing out with his partner said:

—And may we have some refreshment, too, Miss Morkan?

—Julia, said Aunt Kate summarily, and here's Mr Browne and Miss Furlong. Take them in, Julia, with Miss Daly and Miss Power.

—I'm the man for the ladies, said Mr Browne, pursing his lips until his moustache bristled and smiling in all his wrinkles. You know, Miss Morkan, the reason they are so fond of me is—

He did not finish his sentence, but, seeing that Aunt Kate was out of earshot, at once led the three young ladies into the back room. The middle of the room was occupied by two square tables placed end to end, and on these Aunt Julia and the caretaker were straightening and smoothing a large cloth. On the sideboard were arrayed dishes and plates, and glasses and bundles of knives and forks and spoons. The top of the closed square piano served also as

a sideboard for viands and sweets. At a smaller sideboard in one corner two young men were standing, drinking hop-bitters.

Mr Browne led his charges thither and invited them all, in jest, to some ladies' punch, hot, strong and sweet. As they said they never took anything strong he opened three bottles of lemonade for them. Then he asked one of the young men to move aside, and, taking hold of the decanter, filled out for himself a goodly measure of whisky. The young men eyed him respectfully while he took a trial sip.

—God help me, he said, smiling, it's the doctor's orders.

His wizened face broke into a broader smile, and the three young ladies laughed in musical echo to his pleasantry, swaying their bodies to and fro, with nervous jerks of their shoulders. The boldest said:

—O, now, Mr Browne, I'm sure the doctor never ordered anything of the kind.

Mr Browne took another sip of his whisky and said, with sidling mimicry:

—Well, you see, I'm like the famous Mrs Cassidy, who is reported to have said: *Now, Mary Grimes, if I don't take it, make me take it, for I feel I want it.*

His hot face had leaned forward a little too confidentially and he had assumed a very low Dublin accent so that the young ladies, with one instinct, received his speech in silence. Miss Furlong, who was one of Mary Jane's pupils, asked Miss Daly what was the name of the pretty waltz she had played; and Mr Browne, seeing that he was ignored, turned promptly to the two young men who were more appreciative.

A red-faced young woman, dressed in pansy, came into the room, excitedly clapping her hands and crying:

—Quadrilles.⁶ Quadrilles!

Close on her heels came Aunt Kate, crying:

—Two gentlemen and three ladies, Mary Jane!

—O, here's Mr Bergin and Mr Kerrigan, said Mary Jane. Mr Kerrigan, will you take Miss Power? Miss Furlong, may I get you a partner, Mr Bergin. O, that'll just do now.

—Three ladies, Mary Jane, said Aunt Kate.

The two young gentlemen asked the ladies if they might have the pleasure, and Mary Jane turned to Miss Daly.

—O, Miss Daly, you're really awfully good, after playing for the last two dances, but really we're so short of ladies to-night.

—I don't mind in the least, Miss Morkan.

—But I've a nice partner for you, Mr Bartell D'Arcy, the tenor. I'll get him to sing later on. All Dublin is raving about him.

—Lovely voice, lovely voice! said Aunt Kate.

As the piano had twice begun the prelude to the first figure Mary Jane led her recruits quickly from the room. They had hardly gone when Aunt Julia wandered slowly into the room, looking behind her at something.

—What is the matter, Julia? asked Aunt Kate anxiously. Who is it?

Julia, who was carrying in a column of table-napkins, turned to her sister and said, simply, as if the question had surprised her:

—It's only Freddy, Kate, and Gabriel with him.

In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel's size and build, with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips. His heavy-lidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy. He was laughing heartily in a high key at a story which he had been telling Gabriel on the stairs and at the same time rubbing the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye.

—Good-evening, Freddy, said Aunt Julia.

Freddy Malins bade the Misses Morkan good-evening in what seemed an offhand fashion by reason of the habitual catch in his

voice and then, seeing that Mr Browne was grinning at him from the sideboard, crossed the room on rather shaky legs and began to repeat in an undertone the story he had just told to Gabriel.

—He's not so bad, is he? said Aunt Kate to Gabriel.

Gabriel's brows were dark but he raised them quickly and answered:

—O no, hardly noticeable.

—Now, isn't he a terrible fellow! she said. And his poor mother made him take the pledge⁷ on New Year's Eve. But come on, Gabriel, into the drawing-room.

Before leaving the room with Gabriel she signalled to Mr Browne by frowning and shaking her forefinger in warning to and fro. Mr Browne nodded in answer and, when she had gone, said to Freddy Malins:

—Now, then, Teddy, I'm going to fill you out a good glass of lemonade just to buck you up.

Freddy Malins, who was nearing the climax of his story, waved the offer aside impatiently but Mr Browne, having first called Freddy Malins' attention to a disarray in his dress, filled out and handed him a full glass of lemonade. Freddy Malins' left hand accepted the glass mechanically, his right hand being engaged in the mechanical readjustment of his dress. Mr Browne, whose face was once more wrinkling with mirth, poured out for himself a glass of whisky while Freddy Malins exploded, before he had well reached the climax of his story, in a kink of high-pitched bronchitic laughter and, setting down his untasted and overflowing glass, began to rub the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye, repeating words of his last phrase as well as his fit of laughter would allow him.

Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages, to the hushed drawing-room. He liked music but the piece she was playing had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any melody for the other listeners, though they had begged Mary Jane to play something.

Four young men, who had come from the refreshment-room to stand in the door-way at the sound of the piano, had gone away quietly in couples after a few minutes. The only persons who seemed to follow the music were Mary Jane herself, her hands racing along the key-board or lifted from it at the pauses like those of a priestess in momentary imprecation, and Aunt Kate standing at her elbow to turn the page.

Gabriel's eyes, irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall above the piano. A picture of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* hung there and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower⁸ which Aunt Julia had worked in red, blue and brown wools when she was a girl. Probably in the school they had gone to as girls that kind of work had been taught, for one year his mother had worked for him as a birthday present a waistcoat of purple tabinet,⁹ with little foxes' heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round mulberry buttons. It was strange that his mother had had no musical talent though Aunt Kate used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan family. Both she and Julia had always seemed a little proud of their serious and matronly sister. Her photograph stood before the pierglass.¹ She held an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o'-war suit,² lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the names for her sons for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constantine was now senior curate³ in Balbriggan and, thanks to her, Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the Royal University. A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; she had once spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all. It was Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown.

He knew that Mary Jane must be near the end of her piece for she was playing again the opening melody with runs of scales after every bar and while he waited for the end the resentment died down

in his heart. The piece ended with a trill of octaves in the treble and a final deep octave in the bass. Great applause greeted Mary Jane as, blushing and rolling up her music nervously, she escaped from the room. The most vigorous clapping came from the four young men in the doorway who had gone away to the refreshment-room at the beginning of the piece but had come back when the piano had stopped.

Lancers⁴ were arranged. Gabriel found himself partnered with Miss Ivors. She was a frank-mannered talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a low-cut bodice and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bore on it an Irish device.

When they had taken their places she said abruptly:

—I have a crow to pluck with you.

—With me? said Gabriel.

She nodded her head gravely.

—What is it? asked Gabriel, smiling at her solemn manner.

—Who is G. C.? answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.

Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly:

—O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for *The Daily Express*. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?

—Why should I be ashamed of myself? asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

—Well, I'm ashamed of you, said Miss Ivors frankly. To say you'd write for a rag like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton.⁵

A look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel's face. It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in *The Daily Express*, for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a West Briton surely. The books he received for review were almost more welcome than the paltry cheque. He loved to feel the covers and turn over the pages of newly printed books. Nearly every day when his teaching in the college was ended he used to wander down the quays to the second-hand booksellers, to Hickey's on Bachelor's

Walk, to Webb's, or Massey's on Aston's Quay, or to O'Clohissey's in the by-street. He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the University and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books.

When their turn to cross had come he was still perplexed and inattentive. Miss Ivors promptly took his hand in a warm grasp and said in a soft friendly tone:

—Of course, I was only joking. Come, we cross now.

When they were together again she spoke of the University question⁶ and Gabriel felt more at ease. A friend of hers had shown her his review of Browning's poems. That was how she had found out the secret: but she liked the review immensely. Then she said suddenly:

—O, Mr Conroy, will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles⁷ this summer? We're going to stay there a whole month. It will be splendid out in the Atlantic. You ought to come. Mr Clancy is coming, and Mr Kilkelly and Kathleen Kearney. It would be splendid for Gretta too if she'd come. She's from Connach,⁸ isn't she?

—Her people are, said Gabriel shortly.

—But you will come, won't you? said Miss Ivors, laying her warm hand eagerly on his arm.

—The fact is, said Gabriel, I have already arranged to go—

—Go where? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, you know, every year I go for a cycling tour with some fellows and so—

—But where? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany, said Gabriel awkwardly.

—And why do you go to France and Belgium, said Miss Ivors, instead of visiting your own land?

—Well, said Gabriel, it's partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.

—And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish? asked Miss Ivors.

—Well, said Gabriel, if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.

Their neighbours had turned to listen to the cross-examination. Gabriel glanced right and left nervously and tried to keep his good humour under the ordeal which was making a blush invade his forehead.

—And haven't you your own land to visit, continued Miss Ivors, that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country?

—O, to tell you the truth, retorted Gabriel suddenly, I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!

—Why? asked Miss Ivors.

Gabriel did not answer for his retort had heated him.

—Why? repeated Miss Ivors.

They had to go visiting together and, as he had not answered her, Miss Ivors said warmly:

—Of course, you've no answer.

Gabriel tried to cover his agitation by taking part in the dance with great energy. He avoided her eyes for he had seen a sour expression on her face. But when they met in the long chain he was surprised to feel his hand firmly pressed. She looked at him from under her brows for a moment quizzically⁹ until he smiled. Then, just as the chain was about to start again, she stood on tiptoe and whispered into his ear:

—West Briton!

When the lancers were over Gabriel went away to a remote corner of the room where Freddy Malins' mother was sitting. She was a stout feeble old woman with white hair. Her voice had a catch in it like her son's and she stuttered slightly. She had been told that Freddy had come and that he was nearly all right. Gabriel asked her whether she had had a good crossing. She lived with her married

daughter in Glasgow and came to Dublin on a visit once a year. She answered placidly that she had had a beautiful crossing and that the captain had been most attentive to her. She spoke also of the beautiful house her daughter kept in Glasgow, and of all the nice friends they had there. While her tongue rambled on Gabriel tried to banish from his mind all memory of the unpleasant incident with Miss Ivors. Of course the girl or woman, or whatever she was, was an enthusiast but there was a time for all things. Perhaps he ought not to have answered her like that. But she had no right to call him a West Briton before people, even in joke. She had tried to make him ridiculous before people, heckling him and staring at him with her rabbit's eyes.

He saw his wife making her way towards him through the waltzing couples. When she reached him she said into his ear:

—Gabriel, Aunt Kate wants to know won't you carve the goose as usual. Miss Daly will carve the ham and I'll do the pudding.

—All right, said Gabriel.

—She's sending in the younger ones first as soon as this waltz is over so that we'll have the table to ourselves.

—Were you dancing? asked Gabriel.

—Of course I was. Didn't you see me? What words had you with Molly Ivors?

—No words. Why? Did she say so?

—Something like that. I'm trying to get that Mr D'Arcy to sing. He's full of conceit, I think.

—There were no words, said Gabriel moodily, only she wanted me to go for a trip to the west of Ireland and I said I wouldn't.

His wife clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump.

—O, do go, Gabriel, she cried. I'd love to see Galway again.

—You can go if you like, said Gabriel coldly.

She looked at him for a moment, then turned to Mrs Malins and said:

—There's a nice husband for you, Mrs Malins.

While she was threading her way back across the room Mrs Malins, without adverting to the interruption, went on to tell Gabriel what beautiful places there were in Scotland and beautiful scenery. Her son-in-law brought them every year to the lakes and they used to go fishing. Her son-in-law was a splendid fisher. One day he caught a fish, a beautiful big big fish, and the man in the hotel boiled it for their dinner.

Gabriel hardly heard what she said. Now that supper was coming near he began to think again about his speech and about the quotation. When he saw Freddy Malins coming across the room to visit his mother Gabriel left the chair free for him and retired into the embrasure¹ of the window. The room had already cleared and from the back room came the clatter of plates and knives. Those who still remained in the drawing-room seemed tired of dancing and were conversing quietly in little groups. Gabriel's warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument.² How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper-table!

He ran over the headings of his speech: Irish hospitality, sad memories, the Three Graces, Paris,³ the quotation from Browning. He repeated to himself a phrase he had written in his review: *One feels that one is listening to a thought-tormented music*. Miss Ivors had praised the review. Was she sincere? Had she really any life of her own behind all her propagandism? There had never been any ill-feeling between them until that night. It unnerved him to think that she would be at the supper-table, looking up at him while he spoke with her critical quizzing eyes. Perhaps she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech. An idea came into his mind and gave him courage. He would say, alluding to Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia: *Ladies and Gentlemen, the generation which is now on the wane among us may have had its faults but for my part I think it had certain qualities of hospitality, of humour, of humanity, which the new and very*

serious and hypereducated generation that is growing up around us seems to me to lack. Very good: that was one for Miss Ivors. What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?

A murmur in the room attracted his attention. Mr Browne was advancing from the door, gallantly escorting Aunt Julia, who leaned upon his arm, smiling and hanging her head. An irregular musketry of applause escorted her also as far as the piano and then, as Mary Jane seated herself on the stool, and Aunt Julia, no longer smiling, half turned so as to pitch her voice fairly into the room, gradually ceased. Gabriel recognised the prelude. It was that of an old song of Aunt Julia's—*Arrayed for the Bridal*.⁴ Her voice, strong and clear in tone, attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish the air and though she sang very rapidly she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes. To follow the voice, without looking at the singer's face, was to feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight. Gabriel applauded loudly with all the others at the close of the song and loud applause was borne in from the invisible supper-table. It sounded so genuine that a little colour struggled into Aunt Julia's face as she bent to replace in the music-stand the old leather-bound song-book that had her initials on the cover. Freddy Malins, who had listened with his head perched sideways to hear her better, was still applauding when everyone else had ceased and talking animatedly to his mother who nodded her head gravely and slowly in acquiescence. At last, when he could clap no more, he stood up suddenly and hurried across the room to Aunt Julia whose hand he seized and held in both his hands, shaking it when words failed him or the catch in his voice proved too much for him.

—I was just telling my mother, he said, I never heard you sing so well, never. No, I never heard your voice so good as it is to-night. Now! Would you believe that now? That's the truth. Upon my word and honour that's the truth. I never heard your voice sound so fresh and so . . . so clear and fresh, never.

Aunt Julia smiled broadly and murmured something about compliments as she released her hand from his grasp. Mr Browne extended his open hand towards her and said to those who were

near him in the manner of a showman introducing a prodigy to an audience:

—Miss Julia Morkan, my latest discovery!

He was laughing very heartily at this himself when Freddy Malins turned to him and said:

—Well, Browne, if you're serious you might make a worse discovery. All I can say is I never heard her sing half so well as long as I am coming here. And that's the honest truth.

—Neither did I, said Mr Browne. I think her voice has greatly improved.

Aunt Julia shrugged her shoulders and said with meek pride:

—Thirty years ago I hadn't a bad voice as voices go.

—I often told Julia, said Aunt Kate emphatically, that she was simply thrown away in that choir. But she never would be said by me.

She turned as if to appeal to the good sense of the others against a refractory child while Aunt Julia gazed in front of her, a vague smile of reminiscence playing on her face.

—No, continued Aunt Kate, she wouldn't be said or led by anyone, slaving there in that choir night and day, night and day. Six o'clock on Christmas morning! And all for what?

—Well, isn't it for the honour of God, Aunt Kate? asked Mary Jane, twisting round on the piano-stool and smiling.

Aunt Kate turned fiercely on her niece and said:

—I know all about the honour of God, Mary Jane, but I think it's not at all honourable for the pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives and put little whipper-snappers of boys over their heads. I suppose it is for the good of the Church if the pope does it. But it's not just, Mary Jane, and it's not right.

She had worked herself into a passion and would have continued in defence of her sister for it was a sore subject with her but Mary Jane, seeing that all the dancers had come back, intervened pacifically:

—Now, Aunt Kate, you're giving scandal to Mr Browne who is of the other persuasion.⁵

Aunt Kate turned to Mr Browne, who was grinning at this allusion to his religion, and said hastily:

—O, I don't question the pope's being right. I'm only a stupid old woman and I wouldn't presume to do such a thing. But there's such a thing as common everyday politeness and gratitude. And if I were in Julia's place I'd tell that Father Healy straight up to his face . . .

—And besides, Aunt Kate, said Mary Jane, we really are all hungry and when we are hungry we are all very quarrelsome.

—And when we are thirsty we are also quarrelsome, added Mr Browne.

—So that we had better go to supper, said Mary Jane, and finish the discussion afterwards.

On the landing outside the drawing-room Gabriel found his wife and Mary Jane trying to persuade Miss Ivors to stay for supper. But Miss Ivors, who had put on her hat and was buttoning her cloak, would not stay. She did not feel in the least hungry and she had already overstayed her time.

—But only for ten minutes, Molly, said Mrs Conroy. That won't delay you.

—To take a pick itself, said Mary Jane, after all your dancing.

—I really couldn't, said Miss Ivors.

—I am afraid you didn't enjoy yourself at all, said Mary Jane hopelessly.

—Ever so much, I assure you, said Miss Ivors, but you really must let me run off now.

—But how can you get home? asked Mrs Conroy.

—O, it's only two steps up the quay.

Gabriel hesitated a moment and said:

—If you will allow me, Miss Ivors, I'll see you home if you really are obliged to go.

But Miss Ivors broke away from them.

—I won't hear of it, she cried. For goodness sake go in to your suppers and don't mind me. I'm quite well able to take care of myself.

—Well, you're the comical girl, Molly, said Mrs Conroy frankly.

—*Beannacht libh*,⁶ cried Miss Ivors, with a laugh, as she ran down the staircase.

Mary Jane gazed after her, a moody puzzled expression on her face, while Mrs Conroy leaned over the banisters to listen for the hall-door. Gabriel asked himself was he the cause of her abrupt departure. But she did not seem to be in ill humour: she had gone away laughing. He stared blankly down the staircase.

At that moment Aunt Kate came toddling out of the supper-room, almost wringing her hands in despair.

—Where is Gabriel? she cried. Where on earth is Gabriel? There's everyone waiting in there, stage to let, and nobody to carve the goose!

—Here I am, Aunt Kate! cried Gabriel, with sudden animation, ready to carve a flock of geese, if necessary.

A fat brown goose lay at one end of the table and at the other end, on a bed of creased paper strewn with sprigs of parsley, lay a great ham, stripped of its outer skin and peppered over with crust crumbs, a neat paper frill round its shin and beside this was a round of spiced beef. Between these rival ends ran parallel lines of side-dishes: two little minsters of jelly, red and yellow; a shallow dish full of blocks of blancmange⁷ and red jam, a large green leaf-shaped dish with a stalk-shaped handle, on which lay bunches of purple raisins and peeled almonds, a companion dish on which lay a solid rectangle of Smyrna figs, a dish of custard topped with grated nutmeg, a small bowl full of chocolates and sweets wrapped in gold and silver papers and a glass vase in which stood some tall celery stalks. In the centre of the table there stood, as sentries to a fruit-stand which upheld a pyramid of oranges and American apples, two squat old-fashioned decanters of cut glass, one containing port and the other dark sherry. On the closed square piano a pudding in a huge yellow dish lay in waiting and behind it were three squads of

bottles of stout and ale and minerals, drawn up according to the colours of their uniforms, the first two black, with brown and red labels, the third and smallest squad white, with transverse green sashes.

Gabriel took his seat boldly at the head of the table and, having looked to the edge of the carver, plunged his fork firmly into the goose. He felt quite at ease now for he was an expert carver and liked nothing better than to find himself at the head of a well-laden table.

—Miss Furlong, what shall I send you? he asked. A wing or a slice of the breast?

—Just a small slice of the breast.

—Miss Higgins, what for you?

—O, anything at all, Mr Conroy.

While Gabriel and Miss Daly exchanged plates of goose and plates of ham and spiced beef Lily went from guest to guest with a dish of hot floury potatoes wrapped in a white napkin. This was Mary Jane's idea and she had also suggested apple sauce for the goose but Aunt Kate had said that plain roast goose without apple sauce had always been good enough for her and she hoped she might never eat worse. Mary Jane waited on her pupils and saw that they got the best slices and Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia opened and carried across from the piano bottles of stout and ale for the gentlemen and bottles of minerals for the ladies. There was a great deal of confusion and laughter and noise, the noise of orders and counter-orders, of knives and forks, of corks and glass-stoppers. Gabriel began to carve second helpings as soon as he had finished the first round without serving himself. Everyone protested loudly so that he compromised by taking a long draught of stout for he had found the carving hot work. Mary Jane settled down quietly to her supper but Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia were still toddling round the table, walking on each other's heels, getting in each other's way and giving each other unheeded orders. Mr Browne begged of them to sit down and eat their suppers and so did Gabriel but they said there was time enough so that, at last, Freddy Malins stood up and,

capturing Aunt Kate, plumped her down on her chair amid general laughter.

When everyone had been well served Gabriel said, smiling:

—Now, if anyone wants a little more of what vulgar people call stuffing let him or her speak.

A chorus of voices invited him to begin his own supper and Lily came forward with three potatoes which she had reserved for him.

—Very well, said Gabriel amiably, as he took another preparatory draught, kindly forget my existence, ladies and gentlemen, for a few minutes.

He set to his supper and took no part in the conversation with which the table covered Lily's removal of the plates. The subject of talk was the opera company which was then at the Theatre Royal. Mr Bartell D'Arcy, the tenor, a dark-complexioned young man with a smart moustache, praised very highly the leading contralto of the company but Miss Furlong thought she had a rather vulgar style of production. Freddy Malins said there was a negro chieftain singing in the second part of the Gaiety pantomime who had one of the finest tenor voices he had ever heard.

—Have you heard him? he asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy across the table.

—No, answered Mr Bartell D'Arcy carelessly.

—Because, Freddy Malins explained, now I'd be curious to hear your opinion of him. I think he has a grand voice.

—It takes Teddy to find out the really good things, said Mr Browne familiarly to the table.

—And why couldn't he have a voice too? asked Freddy Malins sharply. Is it because he's only a black?

Nobody answered this question and Mary Jane led the table back to the legitimate opera. One of her pupils had given her a pass for *Mignon*.⁸ Of course it was very fine, she said, but it made her think of poor Georgina Burns. Mr Browne could go back farther still, to the old Italian companies that used to come to Dublin—Tietjens, Ilma de Murzka, Campanini, the great Trebelli, Giuglini, Ravelli, Aramburo.

Those were the days, he said, when there was something like singing to be heard in Dublin. He told too of how the top gallery of the old Royal used to be packed night after night, of how one night an Italian tenor had sung five encores to *Let Me Like a Soldier Fall*,⁹ introducing a high C every time, and of how the gallery boys would sometimes in their enthusiasm unyoke the horses from the carriage of some great *prima donna* and pull her themselves through the streets to her hotel. Why did they never play the grand old operas now, he asked, *Dinorah*, *Lucrezia Borgia*?¹ Because they could not get the voices to sing them: that was why.

—O, well, said Mr Bartell D’Arcy, I presume there are as good singers today as there were then.

—Where are they? asked Mr Browne defiantly.

—In London, Paris, Milan, said Mr Bartell d’Arcy warmly. I suppose Caruso² for example, is quite as good, if not better than any of the men you have mentioned.

—Maybe so, said Mr Browne. But I may tell you I doubt it strongly.

—O, I’d give anything to hear Caruso sing, said Mary Jane.

—For me, said Aunt Kate, who had been picking a bone, there was only one tenor. To please me, I mean. But I suppose none of you ever heard of him.

—Who was he, Miss Morkan? asked Mr Bartell D’Arcy politely.

—His name, said Aunt Kate, was Parkinson. I heard him when he was in his prime and I think he had then the purest tenor voice that was ever put into a man’s throat.

—Strange, said Mr Bartell d’Arcy. I never even heard of him.

—Yes, yes, Miss Morkan is right, said Mr Browne. I remember hearing of old Parkinson but he’s too far back for me.

—A beautiful pure sweet mellow English tenor, said Aunt Kate with enthusiasm.

Gabriel having finished, the huge pudding was transferred to the table. The clatter of forks and spoons began again. Gabriel’s wife served out spoonfuls of the pudding and passed the plates down the

table. Midway down they were held up by Mary Jane, who replenished them with raspberry or orange jelly or with blancmange and jam. The pudding was of Aunt Julia's making and she received praises for it from all quarters. She herself said that it was not quite brown enough.

—Well, I hope, Miss Morkan, said Mr Browne, that I'm brown enough for you because, you know, I'm all brown.

All the gentlemen, except Gabriel, ate some of the pudding out of compliment to Aunt Julia. As Gabriel never ate sweets the celery had been left for him. Freddy Malins also took a stalk of celery and ate it with his pudding. He had been told that celery was a capital thing for the blood and he was just then under doctor's care. Mrs Malins, who had been silent all through the supper, said that her son was going down to Mount Melleray in a week or so. The table then spoke of Mount Melleray, how bracing the air was down there, how hospitable the monks were and how they never asked for a penny-piece from their guests.

—And do you mean to say, asked Mr Browne incredulously, that a chap can go down there and put up there as if it were a hotel and live on the fat of the land and then come away without paying a farthing?

—O, most people give some donation to the monastery when they leave, said Mary Jane.

—I wish we had an institution like that in our Church, said Mr Browne candidly.

He was astonished to hear that the monks never spoke, got up at two in the morning and slept in their coffins. He asked what they did it for.

—That's the rule of the order, said Aunt Kate firmly.

—Yes, but why? asked Mr Browne.

Aunt Kate repeated that it was the rule, that was all. Mr Browne still seemed not to understand. Freddy Malins explained to him, as best he could, that the monks were trying to make up for the sins committed by all the sinners in the outside world. The explanation was not very clear for Mr Browne grinned and said:

—I like that idea very much but wouldn't a comfortable spring bed do them as well as a coffin?

—The coffin, said Mary Jane, is to remind them of their last end.

As the subject had grown lugubrious it was buried in a silence of the table during which Mrs Malins could be heard saying to her neighbour in an indistinct undertone:

—They are very good men, the monks, very pious men.

The raisins and almonds and figs and apples and oranges and chocolates and sweets were now passed about the table and Aunt Julia invited all the guests to have either port or sherry. At first Mr Bartell D'Arcy refused to take either but one of his neighbours nudged him and whispered something to him upon which he allowed his glass to be filled. Gradually as the last glasses were being filled the conversation ceased. A pause followed, broken only by the noise of the wine and by unsettlings of chairs. The Misses Morkan, all three, looked down at the tablecloth. Someone coughed once or twice and then a few gentlemen patted the table gently as a signal for silence. The silence came and Gabriel pushed back his chair and stood up.

The patting at once grew louder in encouragement and then ceased altogether. Gabriel leaned his ten trembling fingers on the tablecloth and smiled nervously at the company. Meeting a row of upturned faces he raised his eyes to the chandelier. The piano was playing a waltz tune and he could hear the skirts sweeping against the drawing-room door. People, perhaps, were standing in the snow on the quay outside, gazing up at the lighted windows and listening to the waltz music. The air was pure there. In the distance lay the park where the trees were weighted with snow. The Wellington Monument wore a gleaming cap of snow that flashed westward over the white field of Fifteen Acres.

He began:

—Ladies and Gentlemen.

—It has fallen to my lot this evening, as in years past, to perform a very pleasing task but a task for which I am afraid my poor powers as a speaker are all too inadequate.

—No, no! said Mr Browne.

—But, however that may be, I can only ask you to-night to take the will for the deed and to lend me your attention for a few moments while I endeavour to express to you in words what my feelings are on this occasion.

—Ladies and Gentlemen. It is not the first time that we have gathered together under this hospitable roof, around this hospitable board. It is not the first time that we have been the recipients—or perhaps, I had better say, the victims—of the hospitality of certain good ladies.

He made a circle in the air with his arm and paused. Everyone laughed or smiled at Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia and Mary Jane who all turned crimson with pleasure. Gabriel went on more boldly:

—I feel more strongly with every recurring year that our country has no tradition which does it so much honour and which it should guard so jealously as that of its hospitality. It is a tradition that is unique as far as my experience goes (and I have visited not a few places abroad) among the modern nations. Some would say, perhaps, that with us it is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of. But granted even that, it is, to my mind, a princely failing, and one that I trust will long be cultivated among us. Of one thing, at least, I am sure. As long as this one roof shelters the good ladies aforesaid—and I wish from my heart it may do so for many and many a long year to come—the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality, which our forefathers have handed down to us and which we in turn must hand down to our descendants, is still alive among us.

A hearty murmur of assent ran round the table. It shot through Gabriel's mind that Miss Ivors was not there and that she had gone away discourteously: and he said with confidence in himself:

—Ladies and Gentlemen.

—A new generation is growing up in our midst, a generation actuated by new ideas and new principles. It is serious and enthusiastic for these new ideas and its enthusiasm, even when it is misdirected, is, I believe, in the main sincere. But we are living in a

sceptical and, if I may use the phrase, a thought-tormented age: and sometimes I fear that this new generation, educated or hypereducated as it is, will lack those qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humour which belonged to an older day. Listening to-night to the names of all those great singers of the past it seemed to me, I must confess, that we were living in a less spacious age. Those days might, without exaggeration, be called spacious days: and if they are gone beyond recall let us hope, at least, that in gatherings such as this we shall still speak of them with pride and affection, still cherish in our hearts the memory of those dead and gone great ones whose fame the world will not willingly let die.

—Hear, hear! said Mr Browne loudly.

—But yet, continued Gabriel, his voice falling into a softer inflection, there are always in gatherings such as this sadder thoughts that will recur to our minds: thoughts of the past, of youth, of changes, of absent faces that we miss here to-night. Our path through life is strewn with many such sad memories: and were we to brood upon them always we could not find the heart to go on bravely with our work among the living. We have all of us living duties and living affections which claim, and rightly claim, our strenuous endeavours.

—Therefore, I will not linger on the past. I will not let any gloomy moralising intrude upon us here to-night. Here we are gathered together for a brief moment from the bustle and rush of our everyday routine. We are met here as friends, in the spirit of good-fellowship, as colleagues, also to a certain extent, in the true spirit of *camaraderie*, and as the guests of—what shall I call them?—the Three Graces of the Dublin musical world.

The table burst into applause and laughter at this sally. Aunt Julia vainly asked each of her neighbours in turn to tell her what Gabriel had said.

—He says we are the Three Graces,³ Aunt Julia, said Mary Jane.

Aunt Julia did not understand but she looked up, smiling, at Gabriel, who continued in the same vein:

—Ladies and Gentlemen.

—I will not attempt to play to-night the part that Paris played on another occasion. I will not attempt to choose between them. The task would be an invidious one and one beyond my poor powers. For when I view them in turn, whether it be our chief hostess herself, whose good heart, whose too good heart, has become a byword with all who know her, or her sister, who seems to be gifted with perennial youth and whose singing must have been a surprise and a revelation to us all to-night, or, last but not least, when I consider our youngest hostess, talented, cheerful, hard-working and the best of nieces, I confess, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I do not know to which of them I should award the prize.

Gabriel glanced down at his aunts and, seeing the large smile on Aunt Julia's face and the tears which had risen to Aunt Kate's eyes, hastened to his close. He raised his glass of port gallantly, while every member of the company fingered a glass expectantly, and said loudly:

—Let us toast them all three together. Let us drink to their health, wealth, long life, happiness and prosperity and may they long continue to hold the proud and self-won position which they hold in their profession and the position of honour and affection which they hold in our hearts.

All the guests stood up, glass in hand, and, turning towards the three seated ladies, sang in unison, with Mr Browne as leader:

*For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
Which nobody can deny.*

Aunt Kate was making frank use of her handkerchief and even Aunt Julia seemed moved. Freddy Malins beat time with his pudding-fork and the singers turned towards one another, as if in melodious conference, while they sang, with emphasis:

Unless he tells a lie,

Unless he tells a lie.

Then, turning once more towards their hostesses, they sang:

*For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
Which nobody can deny.*

The acclamation which followed was taken up beyond the door of the supper-room by many of the other guests and renewed time after time, Freddy Malins acting as officer with his fork on high.

The piercing morning air came into the hall where they were standing so that Aunt Kate said:

—Close the door, somebody. Mrs Malins will get her death of cold.

—Browne is out there, Aunt Kate, said Mary Jane.

—Browne is everywhere, said Aunt Kate, lowering her voice.

Mary Jane laughed at her tone.

—Really, she said archly, he is very attentive.

—He has been laid on here like the gas, said Aunt Kate in the same tone, all during the Christmas.

She laughed herself this time good-humouredly and then added quickly:

—But tell him to come in, Mary Jane, and close the door. I hope to goodness he didn't hear me.

At that moment the hall-door was opened and Mr Browne came in from the doorstep, laughing as if his heart would break. He was dressed in a long green overcoat with mock astrakhan cuffs and collar and wore on his head an oval fur cap. He pointed down the snow-covered quay from where the sound of shrill prolonged whistling was borne in.

—Teddy will have all the cabs in Dublin out, he said.

Gabriel advanced from the little pantry behind the office, struggling into his overcoat and, looking round the hall, said:

—Gretta not down yet?

—She's getting on her things, Gabriel, said Aunt Kate.

—Who's playing up there? asked Gabriel.

—Nobody. They're all gone.

—O no, Aunt Kate, said Mary Jane. Bartell D'Arcy and Miss O'Callaghan aren't gone yet.

—Someone is strumming at the piano, anyhow, said Gabriel.

Mary Jane glanced at Gabriel and Mr Browne and said with a shiver:

—It makes me feel cold to look at you two gentlemen muffled up like that. I wouldn't like to face your journey home at this hour.

—I'd like nothing better this minute, said Mr Browne stoutly, than a rattling fine walk in the country or a fast drive with a good spanking goer between the shafts.

—We used to have a very good horse and trap⁴ at home, said Aunt Julia sadly.

—The never-to-be-forgotten Johnny, said Mary Jane, laughing. Aunt Kate and Gabriel laughed too.

—Why, what was wonderful about Johnny? asked Mr Browne.

—The late lamented Patrick Morkan, our grandfather, that is, explained Gabriel, commonly known in his later years as the old gentleman, was a glue-boiler.⁵

—O, now, Gabriel, said Aunt Kate, laughing, he had a starch mill.

—Well, glue or starch, said Gabriel, the old gentleman had a horse by the name of Johnny. And Johnny used to work in the old gentleman's mill, walking round and round in order to drive the mill. That was all very well; but now comes the tragic part about Johnny. One fine day the old gentleman thought he'd like to drive out with the quality⁶ to a military review in the park.

—The Lord have mercy on his soul, said Aunt Kate compassionately.

—Amen, said Gabriel. So the old gentleman, as I said, harnessed Johnny and put on his very best tall hat and his very best stock collar and drove out in grand style from his ancestral mansion somewhere near Back Lane, I think.

Everyone laughed, even Mrs Malins, at Gabriel's manner and Aunt Kate said:

—O now, Gabriel, he didn't live in Back Lane, really. Only the mill was there.

—Out from the mansion of his forefathers, continued Gabriel, he drove with Johnny. And everything went on beautifully until Johnny came in sight of King Billy's statue⁷ and whether he fell in love with the horse King Billy sits on or whether he thought he was back again in the mill, anyhow he began to walk round the statue.

Gabriel paced in a circle round the hall in his goloshes amid the laughter of the others.

—Round and round he went, said Gabriel, and the old gentleman, who was a very pompous old gentleman, was highly indignant. *Go on, sir! What do you mean, sir? Johnny! Johnny! Most extraordinary conduct! Can't understand the horse!*

The peals of laughter which followed Gabriel's imitation of the incident were interrupted by a resounding knock at the hall-door. Mary Jane ran to open it and let in Freddy Malins. Freddy Malins, with his hat well back on his head and his shoulders humped with cold, was puffing and steaming after his exertions.

—I could only get one cab, he said.

—O, we'll find another along the quay, said Gabriel.

—Yes, said Aunt Kate. Better not keep Mrs Malins standing in the draught.

Mrs Malins was helped down the front steps by her son and Mr Browne and, after many manoeuvres, hoisted into the cab. Freddy Malins clambered in after her and spent a long time settling her on the seat, Mr Browne helping him with advice. At last she was settled comfortably and Freddy Malins invited Mr Browne into the cab. There was a good deal of confused talk, and then Mr Browne got into the cab. The cabman settled his rug over his knees, and bent

down for the address. The confusion grew greater and the cabman was directed differently by Freddy Malins and Mr Browne, each of whom had his head out through a window of the cab. The difficulty was to know where to drop Mr Browne along the route and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane helped the discussion from the doorstep with cross-directions and contradictions and abundance of laughter. As for Freddy Malins he was speechless with laughter. He popped his head in and out of the window every moment, to the great danger of his hat, and told his mother how the discussion was progressing till at last Mr Browne shouted to the bewildered cabman above the din of everybody's laughter:

—Do you know Trinity College?

—Yes, sir, said the cabman.

—Well, drive bang up against Trinity College gates, said Mr Browne, and then we'll tell you where to go. You understand now?

—Yes, sir, said the cabman.

—Make like a bird for Trinity College.

—Right, sir, cried the cabman.

The horse was whipped up and the cab rattled off along the quay amid a chorus of laughter and adieus.

Gabriel had not gone to the door with the others. He was in a dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase. A woman was standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terracotta and salmonpink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also. But he could hear little save the noise of laughter and dispute on the front steps, a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing.

He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter

he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter.

The hall-door was closed; and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia and Mary Jane came down the hall, still laughing.

—Well, isn't Freddy terrible? said Mary Jane. He's really terrible.

Gabriel said nothing but pointed up the stairs towards where his wife was standing. Now that the hall-door was closed the voice and the piano could be heard more clearly. Gabriel held up his hand for them to be silent. The song seemed to be in the old Irish tonality and the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice. The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer's hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief:

*O, the rain falls on my heavy locks
And the dew wets my skin,
My babe lies cold ...*

—O, exclaimed Mary Jane. It's Bartell D'Arcy singing and he wouldn't sing all the night. O, I'll get him to sing a song before he goes.

—O do, Mary Jane, said Aunt Kate.

Mary Jane brushed past the others and ran to the staircase but before she reached it the singing stopped and the piano was closed abruptly.

—O, what a pity! she cried. Is he coming down, Gretta?

Gabriel heard his wife answer yes and saw her come down towards them. A few steps behind her were Mr Bartell D'Arcy and Miss O'Callaghan.

—O, Mr D'Arcy, cried Mary Jane, it's downright mean of you to break off like that when we were all in raptures listening to you.

—I have been at him all the evening, said Miss O’Callaghan, and Mrs Conroy too and he told us he had a dreadful cold and couldn’t sing.

—O, Mr D’Arcy, said Aunt Kate, now that was a great fib to tell.

—Can’t you see that I’m as hoarse as a crow? said Mr D’Arcy roughly.

He went into the pantry hastily and put on his overcoat. The others, taken aback by his rude speech, could find nothing to say. Aunt Kate wrinkled her brows and made signs to the others to drop the subject. Mr D’Arcy stood swathing his neck carefully and frowning.

—It’s the weather, said Aunt Julia, after a pause.

—Yes, everybody has colds, said Aunt Kate readily, everybody.

—They say, said Mary Jane, we haven’t had snow like it for thirty years; and I read this morning in the newspapers that the snow is general all over Ireland.

—I love the look of snow, said Aunt Julia sadly.

—So do I, said Miss O’Callaghan. I think Christmas is never really Christmas unless we have the snow on the ground.

—But poor Mr D’Arcy doesn’t like the snow, said Aunt Kate, smiling.

Mr D’Arcy came from the pantry, full swathed and buttoned, and in a repentant tone told them the history of his cold. Everyone gave him advice and said it was a great pity and urged him to be very careful of his throat in the night air. Gabriel watched his wife who did not join in the conversation. She was standing right under the dusty fanlight and the flame of the gas lit up the rich bronze of her hair which he had seen her drying at the fire a few days before. She was in the same attitude and seemed unaware of the talk about her. At last she turned towards them and Gabriel saw that there was colour on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining. A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart.

—Mr D’Arcy, she said, what is the name of that song you were singing?

—It's called *The Lass of Aughrim*,⁸ said Mr D'Arcy, but I couldn't remember it properly. Why? Do you know it?

—*The Lass of Aughrim*, she repeated. I couldn't think of the name.

—It's a very nice air, said Mary Jane. I'm sorry you were not in voice tonight.

—Now, Mary Jane, said Aunt Kate, don't annoy Mr D'Arcy. I won't have him annoyed.

Seeing that all were ready to start she shepherded them to the door where good-night was said:

—Well, good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks for the pleasant evening.

—Good-night, Gabriel. Good-night, Gretta!

—Good-night, Aunt Kate, and thanks ever so much. Good-night, Aunt Julia.

—O, good-night, Gretta, I didn't see you.

—Good-night, Mr D'Arcy. Good-night, Miss O'Callaghan.

—Good-night, Miss Morkan.

—Good-night, again.

—Good-night, all. Safe home.

—Good-night. Good-night.

The morning was still dark. A dull yellow light brooded over the houses and the river; and the sky seemed to be descending. It was slushy underfoot; and only streaks and patches of snow lay on the roofs, on the parapets of the quay and on the area railings. The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river, the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky.

She was walking on before him with Mr Bartell D'Arcy, her shoes in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the slush. She had no longer any grace of attitude but Gabriel's eyes were still bright with happiness. The blood went bounding along his veins; and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.

She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory. A heliotrope⁹ envelope was lying beside his breakfast-cup and he was caressing it with his hand. Birds were twittering in the ivy and the sunny web of the curtain was shimmering along the floor: he could not eat for happiness. They were standing on the crowded platform and he was placing a ticket inside the warm palm of her glove. He was standing with her in the cold, looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace. It was very cold. Her face, fragrant in the cold air, was quite close to his; and suddenly she called out to the man at the furnace:

—Is the fire hot, sir?

But the man could not hear her with the noise of the furnace. It was just as well. He might have answered rudely.

A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries. Like the tender fires of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumined his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls' tender fire. In one letter that he had written to her then he had said: *Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?*

Like distant music these words that he had written years before were borne towards him from the past. He longed to be alone with her. When the others had gone away, when he and she were in their room in the hotel, then they would be alone together. He would call her softly:

—Gretta!

Perhaps she would not hear at once: she would be undressing. Then something in his voice would strike her. She would turn and look at him. . . .

At the corner of Winetavern Street they met a cab. He was glad of its rattling noise as it saved him from conversation. She was looking out of the window and seemed tired. The others spoke only a few words, pointing out some building or street. The horse galloped along wearily under the murky morning sky, dragging his old rattling box after his heels, and Gabriel was again in a cab with her, galloping to catch the boat, galloping to their honeymoon.

As the cab drove across O'Connell¹ Bridge Miss O'Callaghan said:

—They say you never cross O'Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse.

—I see a white man this time, said Gabriel.

—Where? asked Mr Bartell D'Arcy.

Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand.

—Good-night, Dan, he said gaily.

When the cab drew up before the hotel Gabriel jumped out and, in spite of Mr Bartell D'Arcy's protest, paid the driver. He gave the man a shilling over his fare. The man saluted and said:

—A prosperous New Year to you, sir.

—The same to you, said Gabriel cordially.

She leaned for a moment on his arm in getting out of the cab and while standing at the curbstone, bidding the others good-night. She leaned lightly on his arm, as lightly as when she had danced with him a few hours before. He had felt proud and happy then, happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage. But now, after the kindling again of so many memories, the first touch of her body, musical and strange and perfumed, sent through him a keen pang of lust. Under cover of her silence he pressed her arm closely to his side; and, as they stood at the hotel door, he felt that they had escaped from their lives and duties, escaped from home

and friends and run away together with wild and radiant hearts to a new adventure.

An old man was dozing in a great hooded chair in the hall. He lit a candle in the office and went before them to the stairs. They followed him in silence, their feet falling in soft thuds on the thickly carpeted stairs. She mounted the stairs behind the porter, her head bowed in the ascent, her frail shoulders curved as with a burden, her skirt girt tightly about her. He could have flung his arms about her hips and held her still for his arms were trembling with desire to seize her and only the stress of his nails against the palms of his hands held the wild impulse of his body in check. The porter halted on the stairs to settle his guttering candle. They halted too on the steps below him. In the silence Gabriel could hear the falling of the molten wax into the tray and the thumping of his own heart against his ribs.

The porter led them along a corridor and opened a door. Then he set his unstable candle down on a toilet-table and asked at what hour they were to be called in the morning.

—Eight, said Gabriel.

The porter pointed to the tap of the electric-light and began a muttered apology but Gabriel cut him short.

—We don't want any light. We have light enough from the street. And I say, he added, pointing to the candle, you might remove that handsome article, like a good man.

The porter took up his candle again, but slowly for he was surprised by such a novel idea. Then he mumbled good-night and went out. Gabriel shot the lock to.

A ghostly light from the street lamp lay in a long shaft from one window to the door. Gabriel threw his overcoat and hat on a couch and crossed the room towards the window. He looked down into the street in order that his emotion might calm a little. Then he turned and leaned against a chest of drawers with his back to the light. She had taken off her hat and cloak and was standing before a large swinging mirror, unhooking her waist.² Gabriel paused for a few moments, watching her, and then said:

—Gretta!

She turned away from the mirror slowly and walked along the shaft of light towards him. Her face looked so serious and weary that the words would not pass Gabriel's lips. No, it was not the moment yet.

—You looked tired, he said.

—I am a little, she answered.

—You don't feel ill or weak?

—No, tired: that's all.

She went on to the window and stood there, looking out. Gabriel waited again and then, fearing that diffidence was about to conquer him, he said abruptly:

—By the way, Gretta!

—What is it?

—You know that poor fellow Malins? he said quickly.

—Yes. What about him?

—Well, poor fellow, he's a decent sort of chap after all, continued Gabriel in a false voice. He gave me back that sovereign I lent him and I didn't expect it really. It's a pity he wouldn't keep away from that Browne, because he's not a bad fellow at heart.

He was trembling now with annoyance. Why did she seem so abstracted? He did not know how he could begin. Was she annoyed, too, about something? If she would only turn to him or come to him of her own accord! To take her as she was would be brutal. No, he must see some ardour in her eyes first. He longed to be master of her strange mood.

—When did you lend him the pound? she asked, after a pause.

Gabriel strove to restrain himself from breaking out into brutal language about the sottish Malins and his pound. He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her. But he said:

—O, at Christmas, when he opened that little Christmas-card shop in Henry Street.

He was in such a fever of rage and desire that he did not hear her come from the window. She stood before him for an instant, looking at him strangely. Then, suddenly raising herself on tiptoe and resting her hands lightly on his shoulders, she kissed him.

—You are a very generous person, Gabriel, she said.

Gabriel, trembling with delight at her sudden kiss and at the quaintness of her phrase, put his hands on her hair and began smoothing it back, scarcely touching it with his fingers. The washing had made it fine and brilliant. His heart was brimming over with happiness. Just when he was wishing for it she had come to him of her own accord. Perhaps her thoughts had been running with his. Perhaps she had felt the impetuous desire that was in him and then the yielding mood had come upon her. Now that she had fallen to him so easily he wondered why he had been so diffident.

He stood, holding her head between his hands. Then, slipping one arm swiftly about her body and drawing her towards him, he said softly:

—Gretta dear, what are you thinking about?

She did not answer nor yield wholly to his arm. He said again, softly:

—Tell me what it is, Gretta. I think I know what is the matter. Do I know?

She did not answer at once. Then she said in an outburst of tears:

—O, I am thinking about that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*.

She broke loose from him and ran to the bed and, throwing her arms across the bed-rail, hid her face. Gabriel stood stock-still for a moment in astonishment and then followed her. As he passed in the way of the cheval-glass³ he caught sight of himself in full length, his broad, well-filled shirt-front, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror and his glimmering gilt-rimmed eyeglasses. He halted a few paces from her and said:

—What about the song? Why does that make you cry?

She raised her head from her arms and dried her eyes with the back of her hand like a child. A kinder note than he had intended went into his voice.

—Why, Gretta? he asked.

—I am thinking about a person long ago who used to sing that song.

—And who was the person long ago? asked Gabriel, smiling.

—It was a person I used to know in Galway when I was living with my grandmother, she said.

The smile passed away from Gabriel's face. A dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily in his veins.

—Someone you were in love with? he asked ironically.

—It was a young boy I used to know, she answered, named Michael Furey. He used to sing that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*. He was very delicate.

Gabriel was silent. He did not wish her to think that he was interested in this delicate boy.

—I can see him so plainly, she said after a moment. Such eyes as he had: big dark eyes! And such an expression in them—an expression!

—O then, you were in love with him? said Gabriel.

—I used to go out walking with him, she said, when I was in Galway.

A thought flew across Gabriel's mind.

—Perhaps that was why you wanted to go to Galway with that Ivors girl? he said coldly.

She looked at him and asked in surprise:

—What for?

Her eyes made Gabriel feel awkward. He shrugged his shoulders and said:

—How do I know! To see him perhaps.

She looked away from him along the shaft of light towards the window in silence.

—He is dead, she said at length. He died when he was only seventeen. Isn't it a terrible thing to die so young as that?

—What was he? asked Gabriel, still ironically.

—He was in the gasworks,⁴ she said.

Gabriel felt humiliated by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. Instinctively he turned his back more to the light lest she might see the shame that burned upon his forehead.

He tried to keep up his tone of cold interrogation but his voice when he spoke was humble and indifferent.

—I suppose you were in love with this Michael Furey, Gretta, he said.

—I was great with him at that time, she said.

Her voice was veiled and sad. Gabriel, feeling now how vain it would be to try to lead her whither he had purposed, caressed one of her hands and said, also sadly:

—And what did he die of so young, Gretta? Consumption, was it?

—I think he died for me, she answered.

A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world. But he shook himself free of it with an effort of reason and continued to caress her hand. He did not question her again for he felt that she would tell him of herself. Her hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his touch but he continued to caress it just as he had caressed her first letter to him that spring morning.

—It was in the winter, she said, about the beginning of the winter when I was going to leave my grandmother's and come up here to the convent. And he was ill at the time in his lodgings in Galway and wouldn't be let out and his people in Oughterard were written to. He was in decline, they said, or something like that. I never knew rightly.

She paused for a moment and sighed.

—Poor fellow, she said. He was very fond of me and he was such a gentle boy. We used to go out together, walking, you know, Gabriel, like the way they do in the country. He was going to study singing only for his health. He had a very good voice, poor Michael Furey.

—Well; and then? asked Gabriel.

—And then when it came to the time for me to leave Galway and come up to the convent he was much worse and I wouldn't be let see him so I wrote a letter saying I was going up to Dublin and would be back in the summer and hoping he would be better then.

She paused for a moment to get her voice under control and then went on:

—Then the night before I left I was in my grandmother's house in Nuns' Island, packing up, and I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn't see so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering.

—And did you not tell him to go back? asked Gabriel.

—I implored him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well as well! He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree.

—And did he go home? asked Gabriel.

—Yes, he went home. And when I was only a week in the convent he died and he was buried in Oughterard where his people came from. O, the day I heard that, that he was dead!

She stopped, choking with sobs, and overcome by emotion, flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt. Gabriel held

her hand for a moment longer, irresolutely, and then, shy of intruding on her grief, let it fall gently and walked quietly to the window.

She was fast asleep.

Gabriel, leaning on his elbow, looked for a few moments unresentfully on her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath. So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife. His curious eyes rested long upon her face and on her hair: and, as he thought of what she must have been then, in that time of her first girlish beauty, a strange friendly pity for her entered his soul. He did not like to say even to himself that her face was no longer beautiful but he knew that it was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death.

Perhaps she had not told him all the story. His eyes moved to the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon its side. He wondered at his riot of emotions of an hour before. From what had it proceeded? From his aunt's supper, from his own foolish speech, from the wine and dancing, the merry-making when saying good-night in the hall, the pleasure of the walk along the river in the snow. Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in that same drawing-room, dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her, and would find only lame and useless ones. Yes, yes: that would happen very soon.

The air of the room chilled his shoulders. He stretched himself cautiously along under the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age. He thought of how she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years that image of her lover's eyes when he had told her that he did not wish to live.

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen⁵ and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Grain merchant.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Haddington Road, like Adam and Eve's below, is a church.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Concert hall in Dublin. The academy was the Royal Irish Academy of Music.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A dark brown malt liquor, akin to beer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Drunk.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Bet.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A kind of coarse woolen cloth.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Empty and deceptive talk.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: *Irish Melodies* by Dublin-born Thomas Moore (1779–1852), a collection of songs—including one called "O Ye Dead"—that was extremely popular in late 19th- and early 20th-century Ireland.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Board managing the Port of Dublin.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Porridge made by stirring oatmeal in boiling milk or water.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A natural kind of latex that comes from the gutta-percha tree of Southeast Asia.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Originally the name of a troupe of White entertainers, founded in 1943 by George Christy of New York, who wore blackface to perform musical, dance, and comedic skits grounded in stereotypical representations of Black Americans. By Joyce's time the meaning had been extended to any group who blackened their faces to perform as stock plantation characters, based on caricatures.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Gresham Hotel, still one of the best hotels in Dublin.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A square dance usually performed by four couples.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Sign a solemn promise not to drink alcohol.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Probably Edward V and his brother Richard, Duke of York, reputedly murdered in 1483 by their uncle and successor, Richard III.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Silk and wool fabric made chiefly in Ireland.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Large tall mirror.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Sailor suit, favorite wear for children of both sexes early in the 20th century.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Clergyman appointed to assist a parish priest.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A sequence of five quadrilles (square dances).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A pejorative term for one who denies a separate Irish nationality and sees Ireland as simply a western extension of Great Britain.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Namely, whether Ireland's elite Protestant universities should be open to Catholics.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Three small islands lying across the entrance to Galway Bay, on the west coast of Ireland.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Or Connaught, a rural region on the west coast of Ireland.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Teasingly.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Opening for a window in a thick wall.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tribute to Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852), 1st Duke of Wellington, Dublin-born hero of the British army. The obelisk stands in Dublin's Phoenix Park.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Greek mythology, Paris was selected by Zeus to choose which of three goddesses was the most beautiful. The Graces were three sister-goddesses—Aglaia, splendor; Euphrosyne, festivity; and Thalia, rejoicing—who together represented loveliness and joy. Gabriel is making a mental note to refer to his two aunts and Mary Jane in a complimentary way.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: This old song (beginning “Arrayed for the bridal, in beauty behold her”) “is replete with long and complicated runs, requiring a sophisticated and gifted singer” (Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce*, 1974); the suggestion is that Aunt Julia was a really accomplished singer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, Protestant.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Blessing on you (Gaelic; literal trans.); goodbye.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Sweet almond-flavored pudding.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Opera by Ambroise Thomas first produced in Paris in 1866 and in London in 1870.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This song, from the opera *Montana* by W. Wallace (it actually begins “Yes! let me like a soldier fall”), ends on middle C; it would be a piece of exhibitionism to end on a high C, as Joyce’s father, who had a good voice, used to do. Joyce’s brother Stanislaus remembered the song as insufferable rubbish. Mr. Browne is not to be taken seriously as a music critic.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An opera by Donizetti, first produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1833. *Dinorah* is an opera by Meyerbeer, first produced in Paris in 1859.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Enrico Caruso (1873–1921), the great Italian dramatic tenor.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See p. 432, n. 3.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage on springs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Glue was made by boiling animal hides and hoofs.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: People of rank or high social position.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Statue of King William III of England in front of Trinity College, Dublin. He defeated predominantly Irish Catholic forces in the 1690 Battle of the Boyne.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An Irish version of a ballad about a girl deserted by her lover, whom she later tries to find, bringing the baby she had by

him. Other versions are called "Love Gregory" and "Lord Gregory" (the name of the deserting lover), "The Lass of Lochryan," and "The Lass of Ocrum." [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Grayish purple. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847), Irish nationalist, statesman, and orator. His statue stands by O'Connell Bridge in Dublin. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Shirtwaist; a tailored blouse. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Full-length mirror that can be tilted. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Factory where coal gas for heating and lighting is produced. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The name given to many separate peat bogs between the rivers Liffey (which runs through Dublin) and Shannon (which runs through the central plain of Ireland). [Return to reference 5](#)

Ulysses From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, *Ulysses* (1922) is often singled out as the greatest novel of the twentieth century, and so it may be hard to understand the scandal it aroused upon publication. After parts of it first appeared serially in the American journal *The Little Review* from 1918 and the English journal *The Egoist* in 1919, instances in the novel of coarse language, masturbation, and other sexual content led to legal prosecution and to the banning of *Ulysses* as obscene in both the United States and the United Kingdom until the 1930s. New York district judge John M. Woolsey's 1933 ruling that the book, "in spite of its unusual frankness," was not pornographic but an "amazing *tour de force*" set an important precedent in obscenity law. In his perceptive appraisal of *Ulysses*, Woolsey explained Joyce's sexual frankness by saying that the novelist had attempted "to show exactly how the minds of his characters operate" and "to tell fully what his characters think about," conveying "the screen of consciousness with its ever-shifting kaleidoscopic impressions"—that is, not only each character's observations of the present but also the residue of "past impressions, some recent and some drawn up by association from the domain of the subconscious."

Ulysses opens at eight o'clock in the morning of June 16, 1904. Stephen Dedalus (the same character as in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but two years after the last glimpse of him there) has been summoned back to Dublin by his mother's fatal illness. The first three episodes of *Ulysses* concentrate on Stephen, the aloof, uncompromising artist, but the fourth introduces the novel's central character, Leopold Bloom. A somewhat frustrated and confused Jewish outsider in Irish society, Bloom emerges as a humane champion of kindness and justice. We follow closely his every activity: attending a funeral, transacting business, eating lunch, walking through the Dublin streets, worrying about his wife's infidelity with Blazes Boylan, even defecating and masturbating—and at each point the contents of his mind, including retrospect and anticipation, are revealed. Finally, late at night, Bloom and Stephen, who have been just missing each other all day, get together,

Stephen having had too much to drink. Bloom is moved by a paternal feeling toward Stephen, in part because his own son, Rudy, died in infancy, and in a symbolic way Stephen takes Rudy's place; Bloom follows Stephen during subsequent adventures in the role of fatherly protector. The climax of the book comes when Stephen, far gone in drink, and Bloom, worn out with fatigue, succumb to a series of hallucinations, during which their unconscious minds surface in dramatic form and their personalities are disclosed with extraordinary frankness. Then Bloom takes the unresponsive Stephen home and gives him a meal. After Stephen's departure Bloom retires to bed, while his wife, Molly, lying in bed, ends the novel with a long monologue in which she recalls her romantic and other experiences.

On the level of realistic description, *Ulysses* pulses with life and can be enjoyed for its evocation of early twentieth-century Dublin. On the psychological level, it profoundly and movingly reveals the personalities and consciousnesses of Leopold Bloom, Stephen Dedalus, and Molly Bloom. It explores the paradoxes of human loneliness and sociability (Bloom is both Jew and Dubliner, both exile and citizen), and it examines problems in the relations between parent and child, between the generations, and between the sexes. On the level of style, it shimmers with linguistic virtuosity, with many an episode written in a distinctive way that reflects its subject—for example, headlines intruding in a chapter set in a newspaper office (the "Aeolus" episode); the sentimental language of women's magazines dominating a chapter set on a beach where girls are playing ("Nausicaa"); and the pastiche of styles of English literature from its Anglo-Saxon birth to the twentieth century in a chapter set in a maternity hospital ("Oxen of the Sun"). Through its use of themes from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and from other works of literature, and from philosophy and history, the book weaves a subtle pattern of allusion and suggestion.

Those who come to *Ulysses* with narrative expectations drawn from Victorian novels or even twentieth-century novelists such as Conrad and Lawrence will find much that is at first puzzling. In the

novel's stream-of-consciousness method, also known as interior monologue, Joyce presents the consciousness of his characters directly, often without authorial comment. Past and present mingle in the texture of the prose because they mingle in the texture of consciousness; this interweaving can be indicated by puns, by sudden breaks in style or subject matter, or by other devices for keeping the reader constantly in sight of the shifting, multilayered nature of human awareness.

"Penelope" is the last of the eighteen episodes that make up *Ulysses*. It is two o'clock in the morning on June 17, 1904, and Bloom has returned home and joined his wife, Molly, in bed. His return both parallels and differs from Odysseus's return after twenty years' absence to Ithaca, in book 23 of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which he slays all the suitors who have occupied his house and attempted to woo his patient and faithful wife, Penelope. In Joyce's novel, the "Penelope" episode shifts the narrative focus of *Ulysses* from Stephen's and Bloom's male voices to the female voice of Molly Bloom, whose thoughts appear as an interior monologue, unpunctuated until the very end. In this episode, as also at the diaristic end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, there is no third-person narrator. The monologue, often called "Molly Bloom's soliloquy," unfolds in eight flowing, run-on sentences, including the final sentence (or paragraph) printed below, which culminates at the book's end in a resonant affirmation, a memory of her response to Bloom's marriage proposal and ultimately to life itself: "and yes I said yes I will Yes."

In this excerpt, Molly, lying head to toe in bed with the sleeping Bloom, contemplates her relationships with men and often shifts from one "he" to another, from past to present, reality to fantasy, without explicitly marking the change in reference. Although she intermittently tries to quiet her mind ("let me see if I can doze off 1 2 3 4 5"), her thoughts often rapidly tumble forward over memories and hopes and worries, sometimes slowing down to linger over a single point. She revisits the details of her adulterous tryst that afternoon with Blazes Boylan, laments an insufficiently appreciative

Bloom's shortcomings as a lover, and fantasizes about finding romantic and sexual fulfillment. She worries about Stephen's family life, spinning out both maternal and erotic fantasies about him, and she remembers the conception and death of her son, Rudy, a deeply felt loss ten years earlier that has stymied her and Bloom's sexual relationship. She also recalls her girlhood in the colorful, culturally diverse Gibraltar. Reflecting on men and women, she contemplates the differences in their anatomies, sexual natures, freedoms and constraints, and capacities to bring world peace. She decides to give Bloom one more chance to prove himself sexually, and if he cannot pass her test, she will tell him about her affair with Boylan (in Homer's *Odyssey*, Penelope also tests the returning Odysseus to prove he is who he claims to be; her final tests involve knowledge of their bed's construction). Finally, Molly returns to the memory of the day she first gave fully of herself to Bloom, when they lay together on Howth Hill and Bloom proposed to her and she agreed to marry him, a memory infiltrated by and layered with memories of other love interests. All these thoughts and remembrances highlight the differences between Molly and the novel's two other main characters, since Molly's thoughts are neither as abstract as Stephen's nor as concrete as Bloom's, but combine elements of the two, as well as a measure of frank sexuality. Joyce provides an exquisitely detailed and textured portrait of the intricate movements of human consciousness, perhaps more so than can be found in any previous literary work, as Molly swings from the imaginative to the mundane, from regret and longing to a rhapsodic embrace of the world in all its multifariousness, her vital and passionate voice bringing *Ulysses* to a resounding culmination.

From Ulysses

FROM [PENELOPE]

no thats no way for him¹ has he no manners nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I didnt call him Hugh the ignoramus that doesnt know poetry from a cabbage thats what you get for not keeping them in their proper place pulling off his shoes and trousers there on the chair before me so barefaced without even asking permission and standing out that vulgar way in the half of a shirt they wear to be admired like a priest or a butcher or those old hypocrites in the time of Julius Caesar² of course hes right enough in his way to pass the time as a joke sure you might as well be in bed with what with a lion God Im sure hed have something better to say for himself an old Lion would³ O well I suppose its because they were so plump and tempting in my short petticoat he couldnt resist they excite myself sometimes its well for men all the amount of pleasure they get off a womans body were so round and white for them always I wished I was one myself for a change just to try with that thing they have swelling upon you so hard and at the same time so soft when you touch it my uncle John has a thing long I heard those cornerboys saying passing the corner of Marrowbone lane my aunt Mary has a thing hairy because it was dark and they knew a girl was passing it didnt make me blush why should it either its only nature and he puts his thing long into my aunt Marys hairy etcetera and turns out to be you put the handle in a sweepingbrush⁴ men again all over they can pick and choose what they please a married woman or a fast widow or a girl for their different tastes like those houses round behind Irish street⁵ no but were to be always chained up theyre not going to be chaining me up no damn fear once I start I tell you for stupid husbands jealousy why cant we all remain friends over it instead of quarrelling her husband found it out what they did together well

naturally and if he did can he undo it hes coronado anyway whatever he does and then he going to the other mad extreme about the wife in Fair Tyrants⁶ of course the man never even casts a 2nd thought on the husband or wife either its the woman he wants and he gets her what else were we given all those desires for Id like to know I cant help it if Im young still can I its a wonder Im not an old shrivelled hag before my time living with him⁷ so cold never embracing me except sometimes when hes asleep the wrong end of me not knowing I suppose who he has any man thatd kiss a womans bottom Id throw my hat at him after that hed kiss anything unnatural where we havent 1 atom of any kind of expression in us all of us the same 2 lumps of lard before ever Id do that to a man pfooh the dirty brutes the mere thought is enough I kiss the feet of you senorita theres some sense in that didnt he kiss our halldoor⁸ yes he did what a madman nobody understands his cracked ideas but me still of course a woman wants to be embraced 20 times a day almost to make her look young no matter by who so long as to be in love or loved by somebody if the fellow you want isnt there sometimes by the Lord God I was thinking would I go around by the quays there some dark evening where nobodyd know me and pick up a sailor off the sea thatd be hot on for it and not care a pin whose I was only to do it off up in a gate somewhere or one of those wildlooking gipsies in Rathfarnham had their camp pitched near the Bloomfield laundry to try and steal our things if they could I only sent mine there a few times for the name model laundry⁹ sending me back over and over some old ones odd stockings that blackguardlooking fellow with the fine eyes peeling a switch attack me in the dark and ride me up against the wall without a word or a murderer anybody what they do themselves the fine gentlemen in their silk hats that K. C. lives up somewhere this way coming out of Hardwicke lane¹ the night he gave us the fish supper on account of winning over the boxing match of course it was for me he gave it I knew him by his gaiters² and the walk and when I turned round a minute after just to see there was a woman after coming out of it too some filthy prostitute then he goes home to his wife after that

only I suppose the half of those sailors are rotten again with disease
O move over your big carcass out of that for the love of Mike listen
to him the winds that waft my sighs to thee so well he may sleep
and sigh the great Suggester Don Poldo de la Flora³ if he knew how
he came out on the cards this morning hed have something to sigh
for a dark man in some perplexity between 2 7s⁴ too in prison for
Lord knows what he does that I dont know and Im to be slooching
around down in the kitchen to get his lordship his breakfast while
hes rolled up like a mummy will I indeed did you ever see me
running Id just like to see myself at it show them attention and they
treat you like dirt I dont care what anybody says itd be much better
for the world to be governed by the women in it you wouldnt see
women going and killing one another and slaughtering when do you
ever see women rolling around drunk like they do or gambling every
penny they have and losing it on horses yes because a woman
whatever she does she knows where to stop sure they wouldnt be in
the world at all only for us they dont know what it is to be a woman
and a mother how could they where would they all of them be if
they hadnt all a mother to look after them what I never had thats
why I suppose hes⁵ running wild now out at night away from his
books and studies and not living at home on account of the usual
rowy⁶ house I suppose well its a poor case that those that have a
fine son like that theyre not satisfied and I none was he⁷ not able to
make one it wasnt my fault we came together when I was watching
the two dogs up in her behind in the middle of the naked street that
disheartened me altogether I suppose I oughtnt to have buried him⁸
in that little woolly jacket I knitted crying as I was but give it to
some poor child but I knew well Id never have another our 1st death
too it was we were never the same since O Im not going to think
myself into the glooms about that any more I wonder why he⁹
wouldnt stay the night I felt all the time it was somebody strange
he¹ brought in instead of roving around the city meeting God knows
who nightwalkers and pickpockets his poor mother wouldnt like that
if she was alive ruining himself for life perhaps still its a lovely hour
so silent I used to love coming home after dances the air of the

night they have friends they can talk to weve none either he wants what he wont get or its some woman ready to stick her knife in you I hate that in women no wonder they treat us the way they do we are a dreadful lot of bitches I suppose its all the troubles we have makes us so snappy Im not like that he could easy have slept in there on the sofa in the other room I suppose he was as shy as a boy he being so young hardly 20 of me in the next room hed have heard me on the chamber arrah² what harm Dedalus I wonder its like those names in Gibraltar Delapaz Delagracia they had the devils queer names there father Vial plana of Santa Maria that gave me the rosary Rosales y O'Reilly in the Calle las Siete Revueltas and Pisimbo and Mrs Opisso in Governor street³ O what a name Id go and drown myself in the first river if I had a name like her O my and all the bits of streets Paradise ramp and Bedlam ramp and Rodgers ramp and Crutchetts ramp and the devils gap steps⁴ well small blame to me if I am a harumscarum⁵ I know I am a bit I declare to God I dont feel a day older than then I wonder could I get my tongue round any of the Spanish como esta usted muy bien gracias y usted⁶ see I havent forgotten it all I thought I had only for the grammar a noun is the name of any person place or thing pity I never tried to read that novel cantankerous Mrs Rubio lent me by Valera with the questions in it all upside down⁷ the two ways I always knew wed go away in the end I can tell him⁸ the Spanish and he tell me the Italian then hell see Im not so ignorant what a pity he didnt stay Im sure the poor fellow was dead tired and wanted a good sleep badly I could have brought him in his breakfast in bed with a bit of toast so long as I didnt do it on the knife for bad luck⁹ or if the woman was going her rounds with the watercress and something nice and tasty there are a few olives in the kitchen he might like I never could bear the look of them in Abrines I could do the criada¹ the room looks all right since I changed it the other way you see something was telling me all the time Id have to introduce myself not knowing me from Adam very funny wouldnt it Im his wife or pretend we were in Spain with, him half awake without a Gods notion where he is dos huevos

estrellados senor² Lord the cracked things come into my head
sometimes itd be great fun supposing he stayed with us why not
theres the room upstairs empty and Millys³ bed in the back room he
could do his writing and studies at the table in there for all the
scribbling he does at it and if he wants to read in bed in the morning
like me as hes making the breakfast for 1 he can make it for 2 Im
sure Im not going to take in lodgers off the street for him if he takes
a gesabo⁴ of a house like this Id love to have a long talk with an
intelligent welleducated person Id have to get a nice pair of red
slippers like those Turks with the fez used to sell or yellow and a nice
semitransparent morning gown that I badly want or a peachblossom
dressing jacket like the one long ago in Walpoles only 8/6 or 18/6⁵
I'll just give him one more chance Ill get up early in the morning Im
sick of Cohens⁶ old bed in any case I might go over to the markets
to see all the vegetables and cabbages and tomatoes and carrots
and all kinds of splendid fruits all coming in lovely and fresh who
knows whod be the 1st man Id meet theyre out looking for it in the
morning Mamy Dillon used to say they are and the night too that
was her massgoing Id love a big juicy pear now to melt in your
mouth like when I used to be in the longing way then Ill throw him
up his eggs and tea in the moustachecup⁷ she gave him to make his
mouth bigger I suppose hed like my nice cream too I know what Ill
do Ill go about rather gay not too much singing a bit now and then
mi fa pieta Masetto then Ill start dressing myself to go out presto
non son più forte⁸ Ill put on my best shift and drawers let him have
a good eyeful out of that to make his micky stand for him Ill let him
know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn
well fucked too up to my neck nearly not by him 5 or 6 times
handrunning theres the mark of his spunk on the clean sheet I
wouldnt bother to even iron it out that ought to satisfy him if you
dont believe me feel my belly unless I made him stand there and put
him into me Ive a mind to tell him every scrap and make him do it in
front of me serve him right its all his own fault if I am an adulteress
as the thing in the gallery said O much about it if thats all the harm
ever we did in this vale of tears⁹ God knows its not much doesnt

everybody only they hide it I suppose thats what a woman is supposed to be there for or He wouldn't have made us the way He did so attractive to men then if he wants to kiss my bottom Ill drag open my drawers and bulge it right out in his face as large as life he can stick his tongue 7 miles up my hole as hes there my brown part then Ill tell him I want £ 1 or perhaps 30/¹ Ill tell him I want to buy underclothes then if he gives me that well he wont be too bad I dont want to soak it all out of him like other women do I could often have written out a fine cheque for myself and write his name on it for a couple of pounds a few times he forgot to lock it up besides he wont spend it Ill let him do it off on me behind provided he doesnt smear all my good drawers O I suppose that cant be helped Ill do the indifferent 1 or 2 questions Ill know by the answers when hes like that he cant keep a thing back I know every turn in him Ill tighten my bottom well and let out a few smutty words smellrump or lick my shit or the first mad thing comes into my head then Ill suggest about yes O wait now sonny my turn is coming Ill be quite gay and friendly over it O but I was forgetting this bloody pest of a thing² pfooh you wouldnt know which to laugh or cry were such a mixture of plum and apple³ no Ill have to wear the old things so much the better itll be more pointed hell never know whether he did it or not there thats good enough for you any old thing at all then Ill wipe him off me just like a business his omission⁴ then Ill go out Ill have him eying up at the ceiling where is she gone now make him want me thats the only way a quarter after⁵ what an unearthly hour I suppose theyre just getting up in China now combing out their pigtails for the day well soon have the nuns ringing the angelus⁶ theyve nobody coming in to spoil their sleep except an odd priest or two for his night office the alarmclock next door at cockshout clattering the brains out of itself let me see if I can doze off 1 2 3 4 5 what kind of flowers are those they invented like the stars the wallpaper in Lombard street⁷ was much nicer the apron he gave me was like that⁸ something only I only wore it twice better lower this lamp and try again so as I can get up early Ill go to Lambes there beside Findlaters⁹ and get them to send us some flowers to put about the

place in case he brings him¹ home tomorrow today I mean no no Fridays an unlucky day first I want to do the place up someway the dust grows in it I think while Im asleep then we can have music and cigarettes I can accompany him first I must clean the keys of the piano with milk whatll I wear shall I wear a white rose or those fairy cakes in Liptons² I love the smell of a rich big shop at 7 1/2 d a lb or the other ones with the cherries in them and the pinky sugar 11 d a couple of lbs³ of course a nice plant for the middle of the table Id get that cheaper in wait wheres this I saw them not long ago I love flowers Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses God of heaven theres nothing like nature the wild mountains then the sea and the waves rushing then the beautiful country with fields of oats and wheat and all kinds of things and all the fine cattle going about that would do your heart good to see rivers and lakes and flowers all sorts of shapes and smells and colours springing up even out of the ditches primroses and violets nature it is as for them saying theres no God I wouldnt give a snap of my two fingers for all their learning why dont they go and create something I often asked him atheists or whatever they call themselves go and wash the cobbles⁴ off themselves first then they go howling for the priest and they dying and why why because theyre afraid of hell on account of their bad conscience ah yes I know them well who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they dont know neither do I so there you are they might as well try to stop the sun from rising tomorrow the sun shines for you he said the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head⁵ in the grey tweed suit and his straw hat the day I got him to propose to me yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyear like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes and I wouldnt

answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didnt know of Mulvey and Mr Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves and the sailors playing all birds fly and I say stoop⁶ and washing up dishes they called it on the pier and the sentry in front of the governors house with the thing round his white helmet poor devil half roasted and the Spanish girls laughing in their shawls and their tall combs and the auctions in the morning⁷ the Greeks and the jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe and Duke street and the fowl market all clucking outside Larby Sharons and the poor donkeys slipping half asleep and the vague fellows in the cloaks asleep in the shade on the steps and the big wheels of the carts of the bulls and the old castle⁸ thousands of years old yes and those handsome Moors all in white and turbans like kings asking you to sit down in their little bit of a shop and Ronda with the old windows of the posadas glancing eyes a lattice hid for her lover to kiss the iron and the wineshops half open at night and the castanets and the night we missed the boat at Algeciras⁹ the watchman going about serene with his lamp and O that awful deepdown torrent O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens¹ yes and all the queer little streets and pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used² or shall I wear a red³ yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall⁴ and I thought well as well him⁵ as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.

Trieste-Zurich-Paris,
1914–1921.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Blazes Boylan.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Perhaps Julius Caesar's assassins. Toga-wearing Marcus Brutus, together with other conspirators, killed his close friend Caesar and then stood before the public professing his love for him, as dramatized in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (3.1–2).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Penelope calls Odysseus "my lord, my lion heart" in Homer's *Odyssey*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Molly recalls a dirty riddle about Uncle John putting his "thing long" into Aunt Mary's "thing hairy," which actually turns out to be about putting a handle in a sweeping brush. "Marrowbone Lane": a street in southeastern Dublin.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, Irish Town in Gibraltar, which Molly implies was the location of prostitutes' houses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Supposed title of a novel by James Lovebitch, who published under this pseudonym in the early twentieth century but is not known to have written anything with this title. "Coronado": tonsured (Spanish), but Molly probably means "cornudo," or cuckolded.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Leopold Bloom.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Customary Jewish gesture of kissing or touching the mezuzah, a parchment inscribed with religious text and attached to the doorpost of the house. Since there appears to be no parchment affixed to the Blooms' door, it seems that Bloom has secularized the custom. "I kiss the feet of you senorita" [for *señorita*]: translation of a Spanish expression of courtesy or thanks.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Model Laundry, Bloomfield Steam Laundry Company, Ltd., in Rathfarnham, a village four miles south of the Dublin city center.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A street to the east of the Blooms' house in Dublin. "K. C.": King's Counsel, a senior barrister, or lawyer.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Coverings of cloth or leather for the ankle and lower leg.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Molly once pretended to be engaged to a Spanish nobleman named Don Miguel de la Flora, and here she combines his name with her husband's first name, Leopold. "Flora," which means flower, also corresponds to Leopold's last name, Bloom. "The winds that waft my sighs to thee": title of a song by lyricist H. W. Challis and composer William V. Wallace.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Molly has been telling fortunes with cards, and in her reading, Bloom is represented by the king of clubs ("a dark man"), and his position between two sevens indicates perplexity about how he can "benefit by his own integrity."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Stephen Dedalus.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Characterized by rows, or arguments.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Leopold Bloom.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Blooms' son, Rudy, who was born on December 29, 1893, and died eleven days later.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Stephen Dedalus.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Leopold Bloom.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Well, indeed (Irish). "On the chamber": on the chamber pot.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:
Mrs. Catherine Opisso, dressmaker whose shop was on Governor's Street in Gibraltar. "Delapaz Delagracia": de la Paz and de Gracia are common Spanish surnames. "Father Vial plana of Santa Maria": according to Don Gifford, the Reverend J. Vilaplana was associated with the Roman Catholic Cathedral Church of St. Mary the Crowned, but this association does not appear in the directory in Gibraltar until 1912. "Calle las Siete Revueltas": Street of the Seven Turnings (Spanish), known in

English-speaking Gibraltar as City Mill Lane. "Pisimbo": reference unknown.

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Ravine that separates the upper slopes of Gibraltar from the southern plateau. "Paradise ramp and Bedlam ramp and Rodgers ramp and Crutchetts ramp": all stairway streets that slope up the Rock in Gibraltar.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A reckless person.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Basic Spanish conversation: "How are you?" "Very well, thank you. And you?"[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In Spanish, question marks appear upside down at the beginning of the sentence and right side up at the end. "Mrs Rubio": Molly's family's housekeeper in Gibraltar. "Valera": Juan Valera y Alcalá Galiano (1824–1905), Spanish novelist.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Stephen Dedalus.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Using a knife instead of a spoon was considered bad luck.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Servant (Spanish). "Abrines": name of a bakery in Gibraltar.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Two fried eggs, sir (Spanish).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Blooms' teenage daughter, who is away learning photography.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: According to Gifford, "a vaguely pejorative term, as in 'the whole gesabo,' meaning the whole show or mess."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Eight shillings, six pence, or eighteen shillings, six pence. "Fez": hat in the form of a flat-topped cone, usually made of wool or felt. "Walpoles": Walpole Brothers was a store selling cloth in Dublin.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: David Cohen, a boot and shoe salesman, from whom Molly's father purchased the bed in Gibraltar before they moved to Dublin.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cup with a partial cover meant to protect a mustache during drinking.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Quick, my strength is failing (Italian). “Mi fa pieta Masetto”: I’m sorry for Masetto (Italian). Lines from the opera *Don Giovanni* (1787) by Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), which Molly practices in her capacity as a professional singer.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:
Phrase from Psalms 84:6 (or Psalm 83 in the Douay Bible). “As the thing in the gallery said”: during a performance of the play *The Wife of Scarli* (1897), which Molly attended and which she recalls earlier in “Penelope,” a man sitting in the gallery hissed at the protagonist, calling her “a woman adulteress.” The play—an English version by G. A. Greene of an Italian drama, *Tristi amore*, by Giuseppe Giacosa (1847–1906)—appears to condone the title character’s adultery by making her husband an unsympathetic character.
[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Thirty shillings; that is, one pound, ten shillings.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Her menstrual period.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A mixture of good and bad things. In slang usage, a plum is a desirable thing, and the apple is the apple plucked by Eve that caused the fall of humankind.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, Bloom’s emission, or ejaculation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A clock rings a quarter after the hour: it is now 2:15 A.M., and Molly ruminates on the activities of various people at this hour.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Devotional exercise commemorating the Incarnation, announced by the ringing of a bell.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A street in Dublin where the Blooms had their first house, which Molly remembers fondly.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The apron Bloom gave her when they lived at Lombard Street.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Alexander Findlater and Company, Ltd., the tea, wine, and spirits store on Sackville Street Upper in Dublin. “Lambes”:

the fruit and flower shop next to Findlater's store.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Bloom brings Stephen.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Lipton's Ltd., a grocery store in Dublin. "Shall I wear a white rose": lyrics from the song "Shall I Wear a White Rose or Shall I Wear a Red?" by H. S. Clarke and E. B. Farmer, quoted by Molly earlier in the episode. "Fairy cakes": cupcakes.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Eleven pence for two pounds. "7½ d a lb": seven and a half pence per pound.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Lumps or blemishes (dialect English).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Headland on Dublin Bay, about 9 miles northeast of Dublin, where Leopold and Molly were picnicking on September 10, 1888, the day he proposed to her. Bloom recalls the same moment with the seedcake in "Lestrygonians."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A game, which probably depends, like "all birds fly," on the players' ability to obey commands. "Mulvey": Lieutenant Jack Mulvey, Molly's first suitor, whom she recalls at length earlier in the episode. "Mr. Stanhope and Hester": a girlhood friend of Molly's and the friend's husband. "Father": Molly's father, Major Brian Cooper Tweedy of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. "Old captain Groves": a friend of Molly's father.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The daily auction in Commercial Square in Gibraltar. "The thing round his white helmet": a band marking the sentry as a military policeman.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Moorish castle on the Rock of Gibraltar, built in 725 C.E. "Poor donkeys": donkeys were used for carrying supplies up the slopes of the Rock. "Carts of the bulls": carts used for transporting animals for bullfighting.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:
Town in Spain on the opposite side of the Bay of Algeciras from Gibraltar. "Ronda": a town in southern Spain about 40 miles northeast of Gibraltar, with well-preserved Moorish architecture.

“Posadas”: inns (Spanish). “Eyes a lattice hid”: lyrics from the song “In Old Madrid,” with words by Clifton Bingham (1859–1913) and music by Henry Trotere (1855–1912). “For her lover to kiss the iron”: according to Gifford, “a Spanish colloquialism for a conventional gesture of courtship, since the ground-floor windows of Spanish town houses were usually defended by iron grilles.”

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Garden promenade on Gibraltar.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Girls from Andalusia, the southern region of Spain ruled by Muslims, or Moors, in the Middle Ages but also including Christians and Jews.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: More lyrics from the song “Shall I Wear a White Rose or Shall I Wear a Red?”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Wall at the center of the plateau on the upper slopes of the Rock of Gibraltar and the site of Molly’s first kiss from Lieutenant Mulvey, which she recalls earlier in the episode: “he was the first man kissed me under the Moorish wall.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Leopold Bloom.[Return to reference 5](#)

D. H. LAWRENCE

1885–1930

David Herbert Lawrence was born in the midland mining village of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. His father was a miner; his mother, better educated than her husband and self-consciously genteel, fought, all her married life, to lift her children out of the working class. Lawrence was aware from a young age of the struggle between his parents, and allied himself with his mother's delicacy and refinement, resenting his father's coarse and sometimes drunken behavior. In his early novel *Sons and Lovers* (1913), against a background of paternal coarseness conflicting with maternal refinement, Lawrence sets the theme of the demanding mother who has given up the prospect of achieving a true emotional life with her husband and turns to her sons with a stultifying and possessive love. Many years later, Lawrence came to feel that he had failed to appreciate his father's vitality and wholeness, even if they were distorted by the culture in which he lived.

Spurred on by his mother, Lawrence escaped the mining world through education. He won a scholarship to Nottingham high school and later, after working as a clerk and then as an elementary-school teacher, studied for two years at University College, Nottingham, where he obtained his teacher's certificate. Meanwhile he was reading a great deal of literature and some philosophy and was working on his first novel. Publishing a group of poems in 1909, his first short story and his first novel, *The White Peacock*, in 1910, he

was regarded in London literary circles as a promising young writer. He taught school from 1908 to 1912 in Croydon, a suburb of London, but he gave this up after falling in love with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the German wife of a professor at Nottingham. They went to Germany together and married in 1914, after Frieda's divorce.

Abroad with Frieda, Lawrence finished *Sons and Lovers*, at which he had been working off and on for years. The war brought them back to England, where Frieda's German origins and Lawrence's pacifist objection to the war gave him trouble with the authorities. More and more—especially after the almost immediate banning, for indecency, of his next novel, *The Rainbow*, in 1915—Lawrence came to feel that the forces of modern civilization were arrayed against him. As soon as he could leave England after the war, he sought refuge in Italy, Australia, Mexico, then again in Italy, and finally in the south of France, often desperately ill, restlessly searching for an ideal, or at least a tolerable, community in which to live. He died of tuberculosis in the south of France at the age of forty-four.

In his poetry and his fiction, Lawrence seeks to express the deep-rooted, the elemental, the instinctual in people and nature. He is at constant war with the mechanical and artificial, with the constraints and hypocrisies that civilization imposes. Because he had new things to say and a new way of saying them, he was not easily or quickly appreciated. Although his early novels are more conventional in style and treatment, from the publication of *The Rainbow* the critics turned away in bewilderment and condemnation. The rest of his life, during which he produced about a dozen more novels and many poems, short stories, sketches, and miscellaneous articles, was, in his own words, "a savage enough pilgrimage," marked by incessant struggle and by periods of frustration and despair. Phrases such as "supreme impulse" and "quickenings of spontaneous emotion" were characteristic of Lawrence's belief in intuition, in the dark forces of the inner self, that must not be allowed to be swamped by the rational faculties but must be brought into a harmonious relation with them.

The genteel culture of his mother came more and more to represent death for Lawrence. In much of his later work, and especially in some of his short stories, he sets the deadening restrictiveness of conventional middle-class living against the forces of liberation that are often represented by an outsider—a peasant, a gypsy, a worker, a primitive of some kind, someone free by circumstance or personal effort. The recurring theme of his short stories—which contain some of his best work—is the distortion of love by possessiveness or gentility or a false romanticism or a false conception of the life of the artist and the achievement of a living relation between a man and a woman against the pressure of class-feeling or tradition or habit or prejudice.

In his two masterpieces, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* (both of which developed out of what was originally conceived as a single novel to be called *The Sisters*), Lawrence probes, with both subtlety and power, into various aspects of relationship—the relationship between humans and their environment, the relationship between the generations, the relationship between man and woman, the relationship between instinct and intellect, and above all the proper basis for the marriage relationship as he conceived it. Lawrence's view of marriage as a struggle, bound up with the deepest rhythms and most profound instincts, derived from his own relationship with his strong-minded wife. He explores this and other kinds of human relationships with a combination of uncanny psychological precision and intense poetic feeling. His novels have an acute surface realism, a sharp sense of time and place, and brilliant topographical detail; at the same time their high symbolism, both of the total pattern of action and of incidents and objects within it, establishes a formal and emotional rhythm.

In poetry as in fiction, Lawrence sought out new modes of expression. He began writing in traditional verse forms but, especially after 1912, came to feel that poetry had to be unshackled from habit and fixed form if it is to make contact with what he called the "insurgent naked throb of the instant moment." Harkening back to the experiments of the American poet Walt Whitman and

anticipating the more “open” and “organic” forms of the later twentieth century, Lawrence claimed poetry must be spontaneous, flexible, alive, “direct utterance from the instant, whole man,” and should express the “pulsating, carnal self” (“The Poetry of the Present,” 1919). To convey the dynamism of animals and people, the emotional intensity of human relationships, his poems repeat and develop symbols or layer clauses in ritualistic cadences or unfold parallels with ancient myths. Vehemently autobiographical, the vital and even ecstatic encounters with nature, sex, and raw feeling in his poems assert the primacy of the unconscious and instinctual self, from which he felt the cerebral-intellectual self had alienated the English middle classes.

In the late 1950s the critic A. Alvarez judged: “The only native English poet of any importance to survive the First World War was D. H. Lawrence.” Although there are complex reasons for the posthumous critical triumph of this writer who was so much reviled in his lifetime, there is also a simple and striking reason that must not be forgotten. Lawrence had vision; he responded intensely to life; he had a keen ear and a piercing eye for vitality and color and sound, for landscape—be it of England or Italy or New Mexico—for the individuality and concreteness of things in nature, and for the individuality and concreteness of people. His travel sketches are as impressive in their way as his novels and poems; he seizes both on the symbolic incident and on the concrete reality, and each is interpreted in terms of the other. He looked at the world freshly, with his own eyes, avoiding formulas and clichés; and he forged for himself a kind of utterance that, at his best, was able to convey powerfully and vividly what his original vision showed him. A restless pilgrim, he had uncanny perceptions into the depths of physical things and an uncompromising honesty in his view of human beings and the world.

Odour of Chrysanthemums

I

The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston with seven full wagons. It appeared round the corner with loud threats of speed, but the colt that it startled from among the gorse,¹ which still flickered indistinctly in the raw afternoon, out-distanced it at a canter. A woman, walking up the railway line to Underwood, drew back into the hedge, held her basket aside, and watched the footplate of the engine advancing. The trucks² thumped heavily past, one by one, with slow inevitable movement, as she stood insignificantly trapped between the jolting black wagons and the hedge; then they curved away towards the coppice³ where the withered oak leaves dropped noiselessly, while the birds, pulling at the scarlet hips beside the track, made off into the dusk that had already crept into the spinney.⁴ In the open, the smoke from the engine sank and cleaved to the rough grass. The fields were dreary and forsaken, and in the marshy strip that led to the whimsey,⁵ a reedy pit-pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alders, to roost in the tarred fowl-house. The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red sores licking its ashy sides, in the afternoon's stagnant light. Just beyond rose the tapering chimneys and the clumsy black headstocks of Brinsley Colliery.⁶ The two wheels were spinning fast up against the sky, and the winding engine rapped out its little spasms. The miners were being turned up.

The engine whistled as it came into the wide bay of railway lines beside the colliery, where rows of trucks stood in harbour.

Miners, single, trailing and in groups, passed like shadows diverging home. At the edge of the ribbed level of sidings squat a low cottage, three steps down from the cinder track. A large bony

vine clutched at the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof. Round the bricked yard grew a few wintry primroses. Beyond, the long garden sloped down to a bush-covered brook course. There were some twiggy apple trees, winter-crack trees, and ragged cabbages. Beside the path hung disheveled pink chrysanthemums, like pink cloths hung on bushes. A woman came stooping out of the felt-covered fowl-house, half-way down the garden. She closed and padlocked the door, then drew herself erect, having brushed some bits from her white apron.

She was a tall woman of imperious mien, handsome, with definite black eyebrows. Her smooth black hair was parted exactly. For a few moments she stood steadily watching the miners as they passed along the railway: then she turned towards the brook course. Her face was calm and set, her mouth was closed with disillusionment. After a moment she called:

"John!" There was no answer. She waited, and then said distinctly:

"Where are you?"

"Here!" replied a child's sulky voice from among the bushes. The woman looked piercingly through the dusk.

"Are you at that brook?" she asked sternly.

For answer the child showed himself before the raspberry-canecanes that rose like whips. He was a small, sturdy boy of five. He stood quite still, defiantly.

"Oh!" said the mother, conciliated. "I thought you were down at that wet brook—and you remember what I told you——"

The boy did not move or answer.

"Come, come on in," she said more gently, "it's getting dark. There's your grandfather's engine coming down the line!"

The lad advanced slowly, with resentful, taciturn movement. He was dressed in trousers and waistcoat of cloth that was too thick and hard for the size of the garments. They were evidently cut down from a man's clothes.

As they went slowly towards the house he tore at the ragged wisps of chrysanthemums and dropped the petals in handfuls along

the path.

"Don't do that—it does look nasty," said his mother. He refrained, and she, suddenly pitiful, broke off a twig with three or four wan flowers and held them against her face. When mother and son reached the yard her hand hesitated, and instead of laying the flower aside, she pushed it in her apron-band. The mother and son stood at the foot of the three steps looking across the bay of lines at the passing home of the miners. The trundle of the small train was imminent. Suddenly the engine loomed past the house and came to a stop opposite the gate.

The engine-driver, a short man with round grey beard, leaned out of the cab high above the woman.

"Have you got a cup of tea?" he said in a cheery, hearty fashion.

It was her father. She went in, saying she would mash.⁷ Directly, she returned.

"I didn't come to see you on Sunday," began the little grey-bearded man.

"I didn't expect you," said his daughter.

The engine-driver winced; then, reassuming his cheery, airy manner, he said:

"Oh, have you heard then? Well, and what do you think——?"

"I think it is soon enough," she replied.

At her brief censure the little man made an impatient gesture, and said coaxingly, yet with dangerous coldness:

"Well, what's a man to do? It's no sort of life for a man of my years, to sit at my own hearth like a stranger. And if I'm going to marry again it may as well be soon as late—what does it matter to anybody?"

The woman did not reply, but turned and went into the house. The man in the engine-cab stood assertive, till she returned with a cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter on a plate. She went up the steps and stood near the footplate of the hissing engine.

"You needn't 'a' brought me bread an' butter," said her father. "But a cup of tea"—he sipped appreciatively—"it's very nice." He

sipped for a moment or two, then: "I hear as Walter's got another bout⁸ on," he said.

"When hasn't he?" said the woman bitterly.

"I heerd tell of him in the 'Lord Nelson' braggin' as he was going to spend that b—afore he went: half a sovereign⁹ that was."

"When?" asked the woman.

"A' Sat'day night—I know that's true."

"Very likely," she laughed bitterly. "He gives me twenty-three shillings."

"Aye, it's a nice thing, when a man can do nothing with his money but make a beast of himself!" said the grey-whiskered man. The woman turned her head away. Her father swallowed the last of his tea and handed her the cup.

"Aye," he sighed, wiping his mouth. "It's a settler,¹ it is——"

He put his hand on the lever. The little engine strained and groaned, and the train rumbled towards the crossing. The woman again looked across the metals. Darkness was settling over the spaces of the railway and trucks: the miners, in grey somber groups, were still passing home. The winding engine pulsed hurriedly, with brief pauses. Elizabeth Bates looked at the dreary flow of men, then she went indoors. Her husband did not come.

The kitchen was small and full of firelight; red coals piled glowing up the chimney mouth. All the life of the room seemed in the white, warm hearth and the steel fender reflecting the red fire. The cloth was laid for tea; cups glinted in the shadows. At the back, where the lowest stairs protruded into the room, the boy sat struggling with a knife and a piece of white wood. He was almost hidden in the shadow. It was half-past four. They had but to await the father's coming to begin tea. As the mother watched her son's sullen little struggle with the wood, she saw herself in his silence and pertinacity; she saw the father in her child's indifference to all but himself. She seemed to be occupied by her husband. He had probably gone past his home, slunk past his own door, to drink before he came in, while his dinner spoiled and wasted in waiting.

She glanced at the clock, then took the potatoes to strain them in the yard. The garden and fields beyond the brook were closed in uncertain darkness. When she rose with the saucepan, leaving the drain steaming into the night behind her, she saw the yellow lamps were lit along the high road that went up the hill away beyond the space of the railway lines and the field.

Then again she watched the men trooping home, fewer now and fewer.

Indoors the fire was sinking and the room was dark red. The woman put her saucepan on the hob,² and set a batter-pudding near the mouth of the oven. Then she stood unmoving. Directly, gratefully, came quick young steps to the door. Someone hung on the latch a moment, then a little girl entered and began pulling off her outdoor things, dragging a mass of curls, just ripening from gold to brown, over her eyes with her hat.

Her mother chid her for coming late from school, and said she would have to keep her at home the dark winter days.

"Why, mother, it's hardly a bit dark yet. The lamp's not lighted, and my father's not home."

"No, he isn't. But it's a quarter to five! Did you see anything of him?"

The child became serious. She looked at her mother with large, wistful blue eyes.

"No, mother, I've never seen him. Why? Has he come up an' gone past, to Old Brinsley? He hasn't, mother, 'cos I never saw him."

"He'd watch that," said the mother bitterly, "he'd take care as you didn't see him. But you may depend upon it, he's seated in the 'Prince o' Wales.'³ He wouldn't be this late."

The girl looked at her mother piteously.

"Let's have our teas, mother, should we?" said she.

The mother called John to table. She opened the door once more and looked out across the darkness of the lines. All was deserted: she could not hear the winding-engines.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, "he's stopped to get some ripping⁴ done."

They sat down to tea. John, at the end of the table near the door, was almost lost in the darkness. Their faces were hidden from each other. The girl crouched against the fender⁵ slowly moving a thick piece of bread before the fire. The lad, his face a dusky mark on the shadow, sat watching her who was transfigured in the red glow.

"I do think it's beautiful to look in the fire," said the child.

"Do you?" said her mother. "Why?"

"It's so red, and full of little caves—and it feels so nice, and you can fair smell it."

"It'll want mending directly," replied her mother, "and then if your father comes he'll carry on and say there never is a fire when a man comes home sweating from the pit. A public-house is always warm enough."

There was silence till the boy said complainingly: "Make haste, our Annie."

"Well, I am doing! I can't make the fire do it no faster, can I?"

"She keeps wafflin' it about so's to make 'er slow," grumbled the boy.

"Don't have such an evil imagination, child," replied the mother.

Soon the room was busy in the darkness with the crisp sound of crunching. The mother ate very little. She drank her tea determinedly, and sat thinking. When she rose her anger was evident in the stern unbending of her head. She looked at the pudding in the fender, and broke out:

"It is a scandalous thing as a man can't even come home to his dinner! If it's crozzled⁶ up to a cinder I don't see why I should care. Past his very door he goes to get to a public-house, and here I sit with his dinner waiting for him——"

She went out. As she dropped piece after piece of coal on the red fire, the shadows fell on the walls, till the room was almost in total darkness.

"I canna see," grumbled the invisible John. In spite of herself, the mother laughed.

"You know the way to your mouth," she said. She set the dust pan outside the door. When she came again like a shadow on the hearth, the lad repeated, complaining sulkily:

"I canna see."

"Good gracious!" cried the mother irritably, "you're as bad as your father if it's a bit dusk!"

Nevertheless, she took a paper spill from a sheaf on the mantelpiece and proceeded to light the lamp that hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room. As she reached up, her figure displayed itself just rounding with maternity.

"Oh, mother—!" exclaimed the girl.

"What?" said the woman, suspended in the act of putting the lamp-glass over the flame. The copper reflector shone handsomely on her, as she stood with uplifted arm, turning to face her daughter.

"You've got a flower in your apron!" said the child, in a little rapture at this unusual event.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed the woman, relieved. "One would think the house was afire." She replaced the glass and waited a moment before turning up the wick. A pale shadow was seen floating vaguely on the floor.

"Let me smell!" said the child, still rapturously, coming forward and putting her face to her mother's waist.

"Go along, silly!" said the mother, turning up the lamp. The light revealed their suspense so that the woman felt it almost unbearable. Annie was still bending at her waist. Irritably, the mother took the flowers out from her apron-band.

"Oh, mother—don't take them out!" Annie cried, catching her hand and trying to replace the sprig.

"Such nonsense!" said the mother, turning away. The child put the pale chrysanthemums to her lips, murmuring:

"Don't they smell beautiful!"

Her mother gave a short laugh.

"No," she said, "not to me. It was chrysanthemums when I married him, and chrysanthemums when you were born, and the first time they ever brought him home drunk, he'd got brown chrysanthemums in his buttonhole."

She looked at the children. Their eyes and their parted lips were wondering. The mother sat rocking in silence for some time. Then she looked at the clock.

"Twenty minutes to six!" In a tone of fine bitter carelessness she continued: "Eh, he'll not come now till they bring him. There he'll stick! But he needn't come rolling in here in his pit-dirt, for *I* won't wash him. He can lie on the floor—Eh, what a fool I've been, what a fool! And this is what I came here for, to this dirty hole, rats and all, for him to slink past his very door. Twice last week—he's begun now——"

She silenced herself and rose to clear the table.

While for an hour or more the children played, subduedly intent, fertile of imagination, united in fear of the mother's wrath, and in dread of their father's home-coming, Mrs Bates sat in her rocking chair making a "singlet" of thick cream-coloured flannel, which gave a dull wounded sound as she tore off the grey edge. She worked at her sewing with energy, listening to the children, and her anger wearied itself, lay down to rest, opening its eyes from time to time and steadily watching, its ears raised to listen. Sometimes even her anger quailed and shrank, and the mother suspended her sewing, tracing the footsteps that thudded along the sleepers⁷ outside; she would lift her head sharply to bid the children "hush," but she recovered herself in time, and the footsteps went past the gate, and the children were not flung out of their play-world.

But at last Annie sighed, and gave in. She glanced at her wagon of slippers, and loathed the game. She turned plaintively to her mother.

"Mother!"—but she was inarticulate.

John crept out like a frog from under the sofa. His mother glanced up.

"Yes," she said, "just look at those shirt-sleeves!"

The boy held them out to survey them, saying nothing. Then somebody called in a hoarse voice away down the line, and suspense bristled in the room, till two people had gone by outside, talking.

"It is time for bed," said the mother.

"My father hasn't come," wailed Annie plaintively. But her mother was primed with courage.

"Never mind. They'll bring him when he does come—like a log." She meant there would be no scene. "And he may sleep on the floor till he wakes himself. I know he'll not go to work to-morrow after this!"

The children had their hands and faces wiped with a flannel. They were very quiet. When they had put on their night-dresses, they said their prayers, the boy mumbling. The mother looked down at them, at the brown silken bush of intertwining curls in the nape of the girl's neck, at the little black head of the lad, and her heart burst with anger at their father, who caused all three such distress. The children hid their faces in her skirts for comfort.

When Mrs Bates came down, the room was strangely empty, with a tension of expectancy. She took up her sewing and stitched for some time without raising her head. Meantime her anger was tinged with fear.

II

The clock struck eight and she rose suddenly, dropping her sewing on her chair. She went to the stair-foot door, opened it, listening. Then she went out, locking the door behind her.

Something scuffled in the yard, and she started, though she knew it was only the rats with which the place was over-run. The night was very dark. In the great bay of railway lines, bulked with trucks, there was no trace of light, only away back she could see a few yellow lamps at the pit-top, and the red smear of the burning pit-bank on the night. She hurried along the edge of the track, then, crossing the converging lines, came to the stile by the white gates, whence she emerged on the road. Then the fear which had led her

shrank. People were walking up to New Brinsley; she saw the lights in the houses; twenty yards farther on were the broad windows of the "Prince of Wales," very warm and bright, and the loud voices of men could be heard distinctly. What a fool she had been to imagine that anything had happened to him! He was merely drinking over there at the "Prince of Wales." She faltered. She had never yet been to fetch him, and she never would go. So she continued her walk towards the long straggling line of houses, standing back on the highway. She entered a passage between the dwellings.

"Mr Rigley?—Yes! Did you want him? No, he's not in at this minute."

The raw-boned woman leaned forward from her dark scullery⁸ and peered at the other, upon whom fell a dim light through the blind of the kitchen window.

"Is it Mrs Bates?" she asked in a tone tinged with respect.

"Yes. I wondered if your Master was at home. Mine hasn't come yet."

"'Asn't 'e! Oh, Jack's been 'ome an' 'ad 'is dinner an' gone out. 'E's just gone for 'alf an hour afore bed-time. Did you call at the 'Prince of Wales'?"

"No——"

"No, you didn't like——! It's not very nice." The other woman was indulgent. There was an awkward pause. "Jack never said nothink about—about your Master," she said.

"No!—I expect he's stuck in there!"

Elizabeth Bates said this bitterly, and with recklessness. She knew that the woman across the yard was standing at her door listening, but she did not care. As she turned:

"Stop a minute! I'll just go an' ask Jack if 'e knows anythink," said Mrs Rigley.

"Oh no—I wouldn't like to put——!"

"Yes, I will, if you'll just step inside an' see as th' childer doesn't come downstairs and set theirselves afire."

Elizabeth Bates, murmuring a remonstrance, stepped inside. The other woman apologised for the state of the room.

The kitchen needed apology. There were little frocks and trousers and childish undergarments on the squab⁹ and on the floor, and a litter of playthings everywhere. On the black American cloth¹ of the table were pieces of bread and cake, crusts, slops, and a teapot with cold tea.

"Eh, ours is just as bad," said Elizabeth Bates, looking at the woman, not at the house. Mrs Rigley put a shawl over her head and hurried out, saying:

"I shanna be a minute."

The other sat, noting with faint disapproval the general untidiness of the room. Then she fell to counting the shoes of various sizes scattered over the floor. There were twelve. She sighed and said to herself: "No wonder!"—glancing at the litter. There came the scratching of two pairs of feet on the yard, and the Rigleys entered. Elizabeth Bates rose. Rigley was a big man, with very large bones. His head looked particularly bony. Across his temple was a blue scar, caused by a wound got in the pit, a wound in which the coal dust remained blue like tattooing.

" 'Asna 'e come whoam yit?" asked the man, without any form of greeting, but with deference and sympathy. "I couldna say wheer he is—'e's non ower theer!"—he jerked his head to signify the "Prince of Wales."

" 'E's 'appen gone up to th' Yew,"² said Mrs Rigley.

There was another pause. Rigley had evidently something to get off his mind:

"Ah left 'im finishin' a stint," he began. "Loose-all³ 'ad bin gone about ten minutes when we com'n away, an' I shouted: 'Are ter comin', Walt?' an' 'e said: 'Go on, Ah shanna be but a'ef a minnit,' so we com'n ter th' bottom, me an' Bowers, thinkin' as 'e wor just behint, an' 'ud come up i' th' next bantle⁴——"

He stood perplexed, as if answering a charge of deserting his mate. Elizabeth Bates, now again certain of disaster, hastened to

reassure him:

"I expect 'e's gone up to th' 'Yew Tree,' as you say. It's not the first time. I've fretted myself into a fever before now. He'll come home when they carry him."

"Ay, isn't it too bad!" deplored the other woman.

"I'll just step up to Dick's an' see if 'e *is* theer," offered the man, afraid of appearing alarmed, afraid of taking liberties.

"Oh, I wouldn't think of bothering you that far," said Elizabeth Bates, with emphasis, but he knew she was glad of his offer.

As they stumbled up the entry, Elizabeth Bates heard Rigley's wife run across the yard and open her neighbour's door. At this, suddenly all the blood in her body seemed to switch away from her heart.

"Mind!" warned Rigley. "Ah've said many a time as Ah'd fill up them ruts in this entry, sumb'dy 'll be breakin' their legs yit."

She recovered herself and walked quickly along with the miner.

"I don't like leaving the children in bed, and nobody in the house," she said.

"No, you dunna!" he replied courteously. They were soon at the gate of the cottage.

"Well, I shanna be many minnits. Dunna you be frettin' now, 'e'll be all right," said the butty.⁵

"Thank you very much, Mr Rigley," she replied.

"You're welcome!" he stammered, moving away. "I shanna be many minnits."

The house was quiet. Elizabeth Bates took off her hat and shawl, and rolled back the rug. When she had finished, she sat down. It was a few minutes past nine. She was startled by the rapid chuff of the winding-engine at the pit, and the sharp whirr of the brakes on the rope as it descended. Again she felt the painful sweep of her blood, and she put her hand to her side, saying aloud: "Good gracious!—it's only the nine o'clock deputy⁶ going down," rebuking herself.

She sat still, listening. Half an hour of this, and she was wearied out.

"What am I working myself up like this for?" she said pitifully to herself, "I s'll only be doing myself some damage."

She took out her sewing again.

At a quarter to ten there were footsteps. One person! She watched for the door to open. It was an elderly woman, in a black bonnet and a black woollen shawl—his mother. She was about sixty years old, pale, with blue eyes, and her face all wrinkled and lamentable. She shut the door and turned to her daughter-in-law peevishly.

"Eh, Lizzie, whatever shall we do, whatever shall we do!" she cried.

Elizabeth drew back a little, sharply.

"What is it, mother?" she said.

The elder woman seated herself on the sofa.

"I don't know, child, I can't tell you!"—she shook her head slowly. Elizabeth sat watching her, anxious and vexed.

"I don't know," replied the grandmother, sighing very deeply. "There's no end to my troubles, there isn't. The things I've gone through, I'm sure it's enough—!" She wept without wiping her eyes, the tears running.

"But, mother," interrupted Elizabeth, "what do you mean? What is it?"

The grandmother slowly wiped her eyes. The fountains of her tears were stopped by Elizabeth's directness. She wiped her eyes slowly.

"Poor child! Eh, you poor thing!" she moaned. "I don't know what we're going to do, I don't—and you as you are—it's a thing, it is indeed!"

Elizabeth waited.

"Is he dead?" she asked, and at the words her heart swung violently, though she felt a slight flush of shame at the ultimate

extravagance of the question. Her words sufficiently frightened the old lady, almost brought her to herself.

"Don't say so, Elizabeth! We'll hope it's not as bad as that; no, may the Lord spare us that, Elizabeth. Jack Rigley came just as I was sittin' down to a glass afore going to bed, an' 'e said: ' 'Appen you'll go down th' line, Mrs. Bates. Walt's had an accident. 'Appen you'll go an' sit wi' 'er till we can get him home.' I hadn't time to ask him a word afore he was gone. An' I put my bonnet on an' come straight down, Lizzie. I thought to myself: 'Eh, that poor blessed child, if anybody should come an' tell her of a sudden, there's no knowin' what'll 'appen to 'er.' You mustn't let it upset you, Lizzie—or you know what to expect. How long is it, six months—or is it five, Lizzie? Ay!"—the old woman shook her head—"time slips on, it slips on! Ay!"

Elizabeth's thoughts were busy elsewhere. If he was killed—would she be able to manage on the little pension and what she could earn?—she counted up rapidly. If he was hurt—they wouldn't take him to the hospital—how tiresome he would be to nurse!—but perhaps she'd be able to get him away from the drink and his hateful ways. She would—while he was ill. The tears offered to come to her eyes at the picture. But what sentimental luxury was this she was beginning? She turned to consider the children. At any rate she was absolutely necessary for them. They were her business.

"Ay!" repeated the old woman, "it seems but a week or two since he brought me his first wages. Ay—he was a good lad, Elizabeth, he was, in his way. I don't know why he got to be such a trouble, I don't. He was a happy lad at home, only full of spirits. But there's no mistake he's been a handful of trouble, he has! I hope the Lord'll spare him to mend his ways. I hope so, I hope so. You've had a sight o' trouble with him, Elizabeth, you have indeed. But he was a jolly enough lad wi' me, he was, I can assure you. I don't know how it is. . . ."

The old woman continued to muse aloud, a monotonous irritating sound, while Elizabeth thought concentratedly, startled once, when she heard the winding-engine chuff quickly, and the brakes skirr with

a shriek. Then she heard the engine more slowly, and the brakes made no sound. The old woman did not notice. Elizabeth waited in suspense. The mother-in-law talked, with lapses into silence.

"But he wasn't your son, Lizzie, an' it makes a difference. Whatever he was, I remember him when he was little, an' I learned to understand him and to make allowances. You've got to make allowances for them——"

It was half-past ten, and the old woman was saying: "But it's trouble from beginning to end; you're never too old for trouble, never too old for that——" when the gate banged back, and there were heavy feet on the steps.

"I'll go, Lizzie, let me go," cried the old woman, rising. But Elizabeth was at the door. It was a man in pit-clothes.

"They're bringin' 'im, Missis," he said. Elizabeth's heart halted a moment. Then it surged on again, almost suffocating her.

"Is he—is it bad?" she asked.

The man turned away, looking at the darkness:

"The doctor says 'e'd been dead hours. 'E saw 'im i' th' lamp-cabin."

The old woman, who stood just behind Elizabeth, dropped into a chair, and folded her hands, crying: "Oh, my boy, my boy!"

"Hush!" said Elizabeth, with a sharp twitch of a frown. "Be still, mother, don't waken th' children: I wouldn't have them down for anything!"

The old woman moaned softly, rocking herself. The man was drawing away. Elizabeth took a step forward.

"How was it?" she asked.

"Well, I couldn't say for sure," the man replied, very ill at ease. "'E wor finishin' a stint an' th' butties 'ad gone, an' a lot o' stuff come down atop 'n 'im."

"And crushed him?" cried the widow, with a shudder.

"No," said the man, "it fell at th' back of 'im. 'E wor under th' face an' it niver touched 'im. It shut 'im in. It seems 'e wor smothered."

Elizabeth shrank back. She heard the old woman behind her cry:

"What?—what did 'e say it was?"

The man replied, more loudly: "'E wor smothered!"

Then the old woman wailed aloud, and this relieved Elizabeth.

"Oh, mother," she said, putting her hand on the old woman, "don't waken th' children, don't waken th' children."

She wept a little, unknowing, while the old mother rocked herself and moaned. Elizabeth remembered that they were bringing him home, and she must be ready. "They'll lay him in the parlour," she said to herself, standing a moment pale and perplexed.

Then she lighted a candle and went into the tiny room. The air was cold and damp, but she could not make a fire, there was no fireplace. She set down the candle and looked round. The candlelight glittered on the lustre-glasses, on the two vases that held some of the pink chrysanthemums, and on the dark mahogany. There was a cold, deathly smell of chrysanthemums in the room. Elizabeth stood looking at the flowers. She turned away, and calculated whether there would be room to lay him on the floor, between the couch and the chiffonier. She pushed the chairs aside. There would be room to lay him down and to step round him. Then she fetched the old red tablecloth, and another old cloth, spreading them down to save her bit of carpet. She shivered on leaving the parlour; so, from the dresser drawer she took a clean shirt and put it at the fire to air. All the time her mother-in-law was rocking herself in the chair and moaning.

"You'll have to move from there, mother," said Elizabeth. "They'll be bringing him in. Come in the rocker."

The old mother rose mechanically, and seated herself by the fire, continuing to lament. Elizabeth went into the pantry for another candle, and there, in the little pent-house under the naked tiles, she heard them coming. She stood still in the pantry doorway, listening. She heard them pass the end of the house, and come awkwardly down the three steps, a jumble of shuffling footsteps and muttering voices. The old woman was silent. The men were in the yard.

Then Elizabeth heard Matthews, the manager of the pit, say: "You go in first, Jim. Mind!"

The door came open, and the two women saw a collier backing into the room, holding one end of a stretcher, on which they could see the nailed pit-boots of the dead man. The two carriers halted, the man at the head stooping to the lintel of the door.

"Wheer will you have him?" asked the manager, a short, white-bearded man.

Elizabeth roused herself and came from the pantry carrying the unlighted candle.

"In the parlour," she said.

"In there, Jim!" pointed the manager, and the carriers backed round into the tiny room. The coat with which they had covered the body fell off as they awkwardly turned through the two doorways, and the women saw their man, naked to the waist, lying stripped for work. The old woman began to moan in a low voice of horror.

"Lay th' stretcher at th' side," snapped the manager, "an' put 'im on th' cloths. Mind now, mind! Look you now—!"

One of the men had knocked off a vase of chrysanthemums. He stared awkwardly, then they set down the stretcher. Elizabeth did not look at her husband. As soon as she could get in the room, she went and picked up the broken vase and the flowers.

"Wait a minute!" she said.

The three men waited in silence while she mopped up the water with a duster.

"Eh, what a job, what a job, to be sure!" the manager was saying, rubbing his brow with trouble and perplexity. "Never knew such a thing in my life, never! He'd no business to ha' been left. I never knew such a thing in my life! Fell over him clean as a whistle, an' shut him in. Not four foot of space, there wasn't—yet it scarce bruised him."

He looked down at the dead man, lying prone, half naked, all grimed with coal-dust.

"`Sphyxiated,' the doctor said. It *is* the most terrible job I've ever known. Seems as if it was done o' purpose. Clean over him, an' shut 'im in, like a mouse-trap"—he made a sharp, descending gesture with his hand.

The colliers standing by jerked aside their heads in hopeless comment.

The horror of the thing bristled upon them all.

Then they heard the girl's voice upstairs calling shrilly: "Mother, mother—who is it? Mother, who is it?"

Elizabeth hurried to the foot of the stairs and opened the door:

"Go to sleep!" she commanded sharply. "What are you shouting about? Go to sleep at once—there's nothing——"

Then she began to mount the stairs. They could hear her on the boards, and on the plaster floor of the little bedroom. They could hear her distinctly:

"What's the matter now?—what's the matter with you, silly thing?"—her voice was much agitated, with an unreal gentleness.

"I thought it was some men come," said the plaintive voice of the child. "Has he come?"

"Yes, they've brought him. There's nothing to make a fuss about. Go to sleep now, like a good child."

They could hear her voice in the bedroom, they waited whilst she covered the children under the bedclothes.

"Is he drunk?" asked the girl, timidly, faintly.

"No! No—he's not! He—he's asleep."

"Is he asleep downstairs?"

"Yes—and don't make a noise."

There was silence for a moment, then the men heard the frightened child again:

"What's that noise?"

"It's nothing, I tell you, what are you bothering for?"

The noise was the grandmother moaning. She was oblivious of everything, sitting on her chair rocking and moaning. The manager put his hand on her arm and bade her "Sh—sh!!"

The old woman opened her eyes and looked at him. She was shocked by this interruption, and seemed to wonder.

"What time is it?" the plaintive thin voice of the child, sinking back unhappily into sleep, asked this last question.

"Ten o'clock," answered the mother more softly. Then she must have bent down and kissed the children.

Matthews beckoned to the men to come away. They put on their caps and took up the stretcher. Stepping over the body, they tiptoed out of the house. None of them spoke till they were far from the wakeful children.

When Elizabeth came down she found her mother alone on the parlour floor, leaning over the dead man, the tears dropping on him.

"We must lay him out," the wife said. She put on the kettle, then returning knelt at the feet, and began to unfasten the knotted leather laces. The room was clammy and dim with only one candle, so that she had to bend her face almost to the floor. At last she got off the heavy boots and put them away.

"You must help me now," she whispered to the old woman. Together they stripped the man.

When they arose, saw him lying in the naïve dignity of death, the women stood arrested in fear and respect. For a few moments they remained still, looking down, the old mother whimpering. Elizabeth felt countermanded.⁷ She saw him, how utterly inviolable he lay in himself. She had nothing to do with him. She could not accept it. Stooping, she laid her hand on him, in claim. He was still warm, for the mine was hot where he had died. His mother had his face between her hands, and was murmuring incoherently. The old tears fell in succession as drops from wet leaves; the mother was not weeping, merely her tears flowed. Elizabeth embraced the body of her husband, with cheek and lips. She seemed to be listening, inquiring, trying to get some connection. But she could not. She was driven away. He was impregnable.

She rose, went into the kitchen where she poured warm water into a bowl, brought soap and flannel and a soft towel. "I must wash him," she said.

Then the old mother rose stiffly, and watched Elizabeth as she carefully washed his face, carefully brushing his big blond moustache from his mouth with the flannel. She was afraid with a bottomless fear, so she ministered to him. The old woman, jealous, said:

"Let me wipe him!"—and she kneeled on the other side drying slowly as Elizabeth washed, her big black bonnet sometimes brushing the dark head of her daughter-in-law. They worked thus in silence for a long time. They never forgot it was death, and the touch of the man's dead body gave them strange emotions, different in each of the women; a great dread possessed them both, the mother felt the lie was given to her womb, she was denied; the wife felt the utter isolation of the human soul, the child within her was a weight apart from her.

At last it was finished. He was a man of handsome body, and his face showed no traces of drink. He was blond, full-fleshed, with fine limbs. But he was dead.

"Bless him," whispered his mother, looking always at his face, and speaking out of sheer terror. "Dear lad—bless him!" She spoke in a faint, sibilant ecstasy of fear and mother love.

Elizabeth sank down again to the floor, and put her face against his neck, and trembled and shuddered. But she had to draw away again. He was dead, and her living flesh had no place against his. A great dread and weariness held her: she was so unavailing. Her life was gone like this.

"White as milk he is, clear as a twelve-month baby, bless him, the darling!" the old mother murmured to herself. "Not a mark on him, clear and clean and white, beautiful as ever a child was made," she murmured with pride. Elizabeth kept her face hidden.

"He went peaceful, Lizzie—peaceful as sleep. Isn't he beautiful, the lamb? Ay—he must ha' made his peace, Lizzie. 'Appen he made it all right, Lizzie, shut in there. He'd have time. He wouldn't look like this if he hadn't made his peace. The lamb, the dear lamb. Eh, but he had a hearty laugh. I loved to hear it. He had the heartiest laugh, Lizzie, as a lad——"

Elizabeth looked up. The man's mouth was fallen back, slightly open under the cover of the moustache. The eyes, half shut, did not show glazed in the obscurity. Life with its smoky burning gone from him, had left him apart and utterly alien to her. And she knew what a stranger he was to her. In her womb was ice of fear, because of

this separate stranger with whom she had been living as one flesh. Was this what it all meant—utter, intact separateness, obscured by heat of living? In dread she turned her face away. The fact was too deadly. There had been nothing between them, and yet they had come together, exchanging their nakedness repeatedly. Each time he had taken her, they had been two isolated beings, far apart as now. He was no more responsible than she. The child was like ice in her womb. For as she looked at the dead man, her mind, cold and detached, said clearly: "Who am I? What have I been doing? I have been fighting a husband who did not exist. *He* existed all the time. What wrong have I done? What was that I have been living with? There lies the reality, this man." And her soul died in her for fear: she knew she had never seen him, he had never seen her, they had met in the dark and had fought in the dark, not knowing whom they met or whom they fought. And now she saw, and turned silent in seeing. For she had been wrong. She had said he was something he was not; she had felt familiar with him. Whereas he was apart all the while, living as she never lived, feeling as she never felt.

In fear and shame she looked at his naked body, that she had known falsely. And he was the father of her children. Her soul was torn from her body and stood apart. She looked at his naked body and was ashamed, as if she had denied it. After all, it was itself. It seemed awful to her. She looked at his face, and she turned her own face to the wall. For his look was other than hers, his way was not her way. She had denied him what he was—she saw it now. She had refused him as himself. And this had been her life, and his life. She was grateful to death, which restored the truth. And she knew she was not dead.

And all the while her heart was bursting with grief and pity for him. What had he suffered? What stretch of horror for this helpless man! She was rigid with agony. She had not been able to help him. He had been cruelly injured, this naked man, this other being, and she could make no reparation. There were the children—but the children belonged to life. This dead man had nothing to do with them. He and she were only channels through which life had flowed

to issue in the children. She was a mother—but how awful she knew it now to have been a wife. And he, dead now, how awful he must have felt it to be a husband. She felt that in the next world he would be a stranger to her. If they met there, in the beyond, they would only be ashamed of what had been before. The children had come, for some mysterious reason, out of both of them. But the children did not unite them. Now he was dead, she knew how eternally he was apart from her, how eternally he had nothing more to do with her. She saw this episode of her life closed. They had denied each other in life. Now he had withdrawn. An anguish came over her. It was finished then: it had become hopeless between them long before he died. Yet he had been her husband. But how little!

“Have you got his shirt, ‘Lizabeth?”

Elizabeth turned without answering, though she strove to weep and behave as her mother-in-law expected. But she could not, she was silenced. She went into the kitchen and returned with the garment.

“It is aired,” she said, grasping the cotton shirt here and there to try. She was almost ashamed to handle him; what right had she or anyone to lay hands on him; but her touch was humble on his body. It was hard work to clothe him. He was so heavy and inert. A terrible dread gripped her all the while: that he could be so heavy and utterly inert, unresponsive, apart. The horror of the distance between them was almost too much for her—it was so infinite a gap she must look across.

At last it was finished. They covered him with a sheet and left him lying, with his face bound. And she fastened the door of the little parlour, lest the children should see what was lying there. Then, with peace sunk heavy on her heart, she went about making tidy the kitchen. She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame.

1911, 1914

Endnotes

- Note 1: Common prickly bush with yellow flowers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Open freight cars.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A wood of small trees or shrubs.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Thicket.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Machine for raising ore or water from a mine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Coal mine. "Headstocks" support revolving parts of a machine.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Steep the tea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Session; that is, bout of drinking.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Gold coin worth twenty shillings. Half a sovereign is worth ten. "Lord Nelson": name of a public house (pub).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Crushing (or final) blow.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Part of the fireplace.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Name of a pub.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Taking out or cutting away coal or stone (a mining and quarrying term).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Frame that keeps coals in the fireplace.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Curled.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Railroad ties.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Back kitchen.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Couch.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Oilcloth.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the Yew Tree (a pub).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Signal for end of work.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Group.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Workmate, "buddy." Among English coal miners it means a supervisor intermediary between the employers and the men.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Minor coal-mine official.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Contradicted. [Return to reference 7](#)

The Horse Dealer's Daughter

"Well, Mabel, and what are you going to do with yourself?" asked Joe, with foolish flippancy. He felt quite safe himself. Without listening for an answer, he turned aside, worked a grain of tobacco to the tip of his tongue, and spat it out. He did not care about anything, since he felt safe himself.

The three brothers and the sister sat round the desolate breakfast-table, attempting some sort of desultory consultation. The morning's post had given the final tap to the family fortunes, and all was over. The dreary dining-room itself, with its heavy mahogany furniture, looked as if it were waiting to be done away with.

But the consultation amounted to nothing. There was a strange air of ineffectuality about the three men, as they sprawled at table, smoking and reflecting vaguely on their own condition. The girl was alone, a rather short, sullen-looking young woman of twenty-seven. She did not share the same life as her brothers. She would have been good-looking, save for the impressive fixity of her face, "bull-dog," as her brothers called it.

There was a confused tramping of horses' feet outside. The three men all sprawled round in their chairs to watch. Beyond the dark holly bushes that separated the strip of lawn from the high-road, they could see a cavalcade of shire horses swinging out of their own yard, being taken for exercise. This was the last time. These were the last horses that would go through their hands. The young men watched with critical, callous look. They were all frightened at the collapse of their lives, and the sense of disaster in which they were involved left them no inner freedom.

Yet they were three fine, well-set fellows enough. Joe, the eldest, was a man of thirty-three, broad and handsome in a hot, flushed way. His face was red, he twisted his black moustache over a thick finger, his eyes were shallow and restless. He had a sensual way of

uncovering his teeth when he laughed, and his bearing was stupid. Now he watched the horses with a glazed look of helplessness in his eyes, a certain stupor of downfall.

The great draught horses swung past. They were tied head to tail, four of them, and they heaved along to where a lane branched off from the high-road, planting their great hoofs floutingly in the fine black mud, swinging their great rounded haunches sumptuously, and trotting a few sudden steps as they were led into the lane, round the corner. Every movement showed a massive, slumbrous strength, and a stupidity which held them in subjection. The groom at the head looked back, jerking the leading rope. And the cavalcade moved out of sight up the lane, the tail of the last horse, bobbed up tight and stiff, held out taut from the swinging great haunches as they rocked behind the hedges in a motion-like sleep.

Joe watched with glazed hopeless eyes. The horses were almost like his own body to him. He felt he was done for now. Luckily he was engaged to a woman as old as himself, and therefore her father, who was steward of a neighbouring estate, would provide him with a job. He would marry and go into harness. His life was over, he would be a subject animal now.

He turned uneasily aside, the retreating steps of the horses echoing in his ears. Then, with foolish restlessness, he reached for the scraps of bacon-rind from the plates, and making a faint whistling sound, flung them to the terrier that lay against the fender. He watched the dog swallow them, and waited till the creature looked into his eyes. Then a faint grin came on his face, and in a high, foolish voice he said:

"You won't get much more bacon, shall you, you little b——?"

The dog faintly and dismally wagged its tail, then lowered its haunches, circled round, and lay down again.

There was another helpless silence at the table. Joe sprawled uneasily in his seat, not willing to go till the family conclave was dissolved. Fred Henry, the second brother, was erect, clean-limbed, alert. He had watched the passing of the horses with more *sang-froid*.¹ If he was an animal, like Joe, he was an animal which

controls, not one which is controlled. He was master of any horse, and he carried himself with a well-tempered air of mastery. But he was not master of the situations of life. He pushed his coarse brown moustache upwards, off his lip, and glanced irritably at his sister, who sat impassive and inscrutable.

"You'll go and stop with Lucy for a bit, shan't you?" he asked. The girl did not answer.

"I don't see what else you can do," persisted Fred Henry.

"Go as a skivvy,"² Joe interpolated laconically.

The girl did not move a muscle.

"If I was her, I should go in for training for a nurse," said Malcolm, the youngest of them all. He was the baby of the family, a young man of twenty-two, with a fresh, jaunty *museau*.³

But Mabel did not take any notice of him. They had talked at her and round her for so many years, that she hardly heard them at all.

The marble clock on the mantelpiece softly chimed the half-hour, the dog rose uneasily from the hearth-rug and looked at the party at the breakfast-table. But still they sat in an ineffectual conclave.

"Oh, all right," said Joe suddenly, apropos of nothing. "I'll get a move on."

He pushed back his chair, straddled his knees with a downward jerk, to get them free, in horsey fashion, and went to the fire. Still he did not go out of the room; he was curious to know what the others would do or say. He began to charge his pipe, looking down at the dog and saying in a high, affected voice:

"Going wi' me? Going wi' me are ter? Tha'rt goin' further than tha counts on just now, dost hear?"

The dog faintly wagged his tail, the man stuck out his jaw and covered his pipe with his hands, and puffed intently, losing himself in the tobacco, looking down all the while at the dog with an absent brown eye. The dog looked up at him in mournful distrust. Joe stood with his knees stuck out, in real horsey fashion.

"Have you had a letter from Lucy?" Fred Henry asked of his sister.

"Last week," came the neutral reply.

"And what does she say?"

There was no answer.

"Does she *ask* you to go and stop there?" persisted Fred Henry.

"She says I can if I like."

"Well, then, you'd better. Tell her you'll come on Monday."

This was received in silence.

"That's what you'll do then, is it?" said Fred Henry, in some exasperation.

But she made no answer. There was a silence of futility and irritation in the room. Malcolm grinned fatuously.

"You'll have to make up your mind between now and next Wednesday," said Joe loudly, "or else find yourself lodgings on the kerbstone."

The face of the young woman darkened, but she sat on immutable.

"Here's Jack Ferguson!" exclaimed Malcolm, who was looking aimlessly out of the window.

"Where?" exclaimed Joe loudly.

"Just gone past."

"Coming in?"

Malcolm craned his neck to see the gate.

"Yes," he said.

There was a silence. Mabel sat on like one condemned, at the head of the table. Then a whistle was heard from the kitchen. The dog got up and barked sharply. Joe opened the door and shouted:

"Come on."

After a moment a young man entered. He was muffled up in overcoat and a purple woollen scarf, and his tweed cap, which he did not remove, was pulled down on his head. He was of medium height, his face was rather long and pale, his eyes looked tired.

"Hello, Jack! Well, Jack!" exclaimed Malcolm and Joe. Fred Henry merely said: "Jack."

"What's doing?" asked the newcomer, evidently addressing Fred Henry.

"Same. We've got to be out by Wednesday. Got a cold?"

"I have—got it bad, too."

"Why don't you stop in?"

"*Me* stop in? When I can't stand on my legs, perhaps I shall have a chance." The young man spoke huskily. He had a slight Scotch accent.

"It's a knock-out, isn't it," said Joe, boisterously, "if a doctor goes round croaking with a cold. Looks bad for the patients, doesn't it?"

The young doctor looked at him slowly.

"Anything the matter with *you*, then?" he asked sarcastically.

"Not as I know of. Damn your eyes, I hope not. Why?"

"I thought you were very concerned about the patients, wondered if you might be one yourself."

"Damn it, no, I've never been patient to no flaming doctor, and hope I never shall be," returned Joe.

At this point Mabel rose from the table, and they all seemed to become aware of her existence. She began putting the dishes together. The young doctor looked at her, but did not address her. He had not greeted her. She went out of the room with the tray, her face impassive and unchanged.

"When are you off then, all of you?" asked the doctor.

"I'm catching the eleven-forty," replied Malcolm. "Are you goin' down wi' th' trap, Joe?"

"Yes, I've told you I'm going down wi' th' trap, haven't I?"

"We'd better be getting her in then. So long Jack, if I don't see you before I go," said Malcolm, shaking hands.

He went out, followed by Joe, who seemed to have his tail between his legs.

"Well, this is the devil's own," exclaimed the doctor, when he was left alone with Fred Henry. "Going before Wednesday, are you?"

"That's the orders," replied the other.

"Where, to Northampton?"

"That's it."

"The devil!" exclaimed Ferguson, with quiet chagrin.

And there was silence between the two.

"All settled up, are you?" asked Ferguson.

"About."

There was another pause.

"Well, I shall miss yer, Freddy, boy," said the young doctor.

"And I shall miss thee, Jack," returned the other.

"Miss you like hell," mused the doctor.

Fred Henry turned aside. There was nothing to say. Mabel came in again, to finish clearing the table.

"What are *you* going to do, then, Miss Pervin?" asked Ferguson.

"Going to your sister's, are you?"

Mabel looked at him with her steady, dangerous eyes, that always made him uncomfortable, unsettling his superficial ease.

"No," she said.

"Well, what in the name of fortune *are* you going to do? Say what you mean to do," cried Fred Henry, with futile intensity.

But she only averted her head, and continued her work. She folded the white table-cloth, and put on the chenille cloth.

"The sulkiest bitch that ever trod!" muttered her brother.

But she finished her task with perfectly impassive face, the young doctor watching her interestedly all the while. Then she went out.

Fred Henry stared after her, clenching his lips, his blue eyes fixing in sharp antagonism, as he made a grimace of sour exasperation.

"You could bray⁴ her into bits, and that's all you'd get out of her," he said, in a small, narrowed tone.

The doctor smiled faintly.

"What's she *going* to do, then?" he asked.

"Strike me if *I* know!" returned the other.

There was a pause. Then the doctor stirred.

"I'll be seeing you tonight, shall I?" he said to his friend.

"Ay—where's it to be? Are we going over to Jessdale?"

"I don't know. I've got such a cold on me. I'll come round to the 'Moon and Stars,'⁵ anyway."

"Let Lizzie and May miss their night for once, eh?"

"That's it—if I feel as I do now."

"All's one——"

The two young men went through the passage and down to the back door together. The house was large, but it was servantless now, and desolate. At the back was a small bricked house-yard and beyond that a big square, gravelled fine and red, and having stables on two sides. Sloping, dank, winter-dark fields stretched away on the open sides.

But the stables were empty. Joseph Pervin, the father of the family, had been a man of no education, who had become a fairly large horse dealer. The stables had been full of horses, there was a great turmoil and come-and-go of horses and of dealers and grooms. Then the kitchen was full of servants. But of late things had declined. The old man had married a second time, to retrieve his fortunes. Now he was dead and everything was gone to the dogs,⁶ there was nothing but debt and threatening.

For months, Mabel had been servantless in the big house, keeping the home together in penury for her ineffectual brothers. She had kept house for ten years. But previously it was with unstinted means. Then, however brutal and coarse everything was, the sense of money had kept her proud, confident. The men might be foul-mouthed, the women in the kitchen might have had reputations, her brothers might have illegitimate children. But so long as there was money, the girl felt herself established, and brutally proud, reserved.

No company came to the house, save dealers and coarse men. Mabel had no associates of her own sex, after her sister went away. But she did not mind. She went regularly to church, she attended to her father. And she lived in the memory of her mother, who had died when she was fourteen, and whom she had loved. She had loved her father, too, in a different way, depending upon him, and feeling secure in him, until at the age of fifty-four, he married again. And

then she had set hard against him. Now he had died and left them all hopelessly in debt.

She had suffered badly during the period of poverty. Nothing, however, could shake the curious, sullen, animal pride that dominated each member of the family. Now, for Mabel, the end had come. Still she would not cast about her. She would follow her own way just the same. She would always hold the keys of her own situation. Mindless and persistent, she endured from day to day. Why should she think? Why should she answer anybody? It was enough that this was the end, and there was no way out. She need not pass any more darkly along the main street of the small town, avoiding every eye. She need not demean herself any more, going into the shops and buying the cheapest food. This was at an end. She thought of nobody, not even of herself. Mindless and persistent, she seemed in a sort of ecstasy to be coming nearer to her fulfilment, her own glorification, approaching her dead mother, who was glorified.

In the afternoon, she took a little bag, with shears and sponge and a small scrubbing-brush, and went out. It was a grey, wintry day, with saddened, dark green fields and an atmosphere blackened by the smoke of foundries not far off. She went quickly, darkly along the causeway, heeding nobody, through the town to the churchyard.

There she always felt secure, as if no one could see her, although as a matter of fact she was exposed to the stare of everyone who passed along under the churchyard wall. Nevertheless, once under the shadow of the great looming church, among the graves, she felt immune from the world, reserved within the thick churchyard wall as in another country.

Carefully she clipped the grass from the grave, and arranged the pinky-white, small chrysanthemums in the tin cross. When this was done, she took an empty jar from a neighbouring grave, brought water, and carefully, most scrupulously sponged the marble headstone and the coping-stone.

It gave her sincere satisfaction to do this. She felt in immediate contact with the world of her mother. She took minute pains, went

through the park in a state bordering on pure happiness, as if in performing this task she came into a subtle, intimate connection with her mother. For the life she followed here in the world was far less real than the world of death she inherited from her mother.

The doctor's house was just by the church. Ferguson, being a mere hired assistant, was slave to the country-side. As he hurried now to attend to the out-patients in the surgery, glancing across the graveyard with his quick eye, he saw the girl at her task at the grave. She seemed so intent and remote, it was like looking into another world. Some mystical element was touched in him. He slowed down as he walked, watching her as if spellbound.

She lifted her eyes, feeling him looking. Their eyes met. And each looked away again at once, each feeling, in some way, found out by the other. He lifted his cap and passed on down the road. There remained distinct in his consciousness, like a vision, the memory of her face, lifted from the tombstone in the churchyard, and looking at him with slow, large, portentous eyes. It *was* portentous, her face. It seemed to mesmerise him. There was a heavy power in her eyes which laid hold of his whole being, as if he had drunk some powerful drug. He had been feeling weak and done before. Now the life came back into him, he felt delivered from his own fretted, daily self.

He finished his duties at the surgery as quickly as might be, hastily filling up the bottles of the waiting people with cheap drugs. Then, in perpetual haste, he set off again to visit several cases in another part of his round, before tea-time. At all times he preferred to walk if he could, but particularly when he was not well. He fancied the motion restored him.

The afternoon was falling. It was grey, deadened, and wintry, with a slow, moist, heavy coldness sinking in and deadening all the faculties. But why should he think or notice? He hastily climbed the hill and turned across the dark green fields, following the black cinder-track. In the distance, across a shallow dip in the country, the small town was clustered like smouldering ash, a tower, a spire, a heap of low, raw, extinct houses. And on the nearest fringe of the

town, sloping into the dip, was Oldmeadow, the Pervins' house. He could see the stables and the outbuildings distinctly, as they lay towards him on the slope. Well, he would not go there many more times! Another resource would be lost to him, another place gone: the only company he cared for in the alien, ugly little town he was losing. Nothing but work, drudgery, constant hastening from dwelling to dwelling among the colliers and the iron-workers. It wore him out, but at the same time he had a craving for it. It was a stimulant to him to be in the homes of the working people, moving, as it were, through the innermost body of their life. His nerves were excited and gratified. He could come so near, into the very lives of the rough, inarticulate, powerfully emotional men and women. He grumbled, he said he hated the hellish hole. But as a matter of fact it excited him, the contact with the rough, strongly-feeling people was a stimulant applied direct to his nerves.

Below Oldmeadow, in the green, shallow, saddened hollow of fields, lay a square, deep pond. Roving across the landscape, the doctor's quick eye detected a figure in black passing through the gate of the field, down towards the pond. He looked again. It would be Mabel Pervin. His mind suddenly became alive and attentive.

Why was she going down there? He pulled up on the path on the slope above, and stood staring. He could just make sure of the small black figure moving in the hollow of the failing day. He seemed to see her in the midst of such obscurity, that he was like a clairvoyant, seeing rather with the mind's eye than with ordinary sight. Yet he could see her positively enough, whilst he kept his eye attentive. He felt, if he looked away from her, in the thick, ugly falling dusk, he would lose her altogether.

He followed her minutely as she moved, direct and intent, like something transmitted rather than stirring in voluntary activity, straight down the field towards the pond. There she stood on the bank for a moment. She never raised her head. Then she waded slowly into the water.

He stood motionless as the small black figure walked slowly and deliberately towards the centre of the pond, very slowly, gradually

moving deeper into the motionless water, and still moving forward as the water got up to her breast. Then he could see her no more in the dusk of the dead afternoon.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Would you believe it?"

And he hastened straight down, running over the wet, soddened fields, pushing through the hedges, down into the depression of callous wintry obscurity. It took him several minutes to come to the pond. He stood on the bank, breathing heavily. He could see nothing. His eyes seemed to penetrate the dead water. Yes, perhaps that was the dark shadow of her black clothing beneath the surface of the water.

He slowly ventured into the pond. The bottom was deep, soft clay, he sank in, and the water clasped dead cold round his legs. As he stirred he could smell the cold, rotten clay that fouled up into the water. It was objectionable in his lungs. Still, repelled and yet not heeding, he moved deeper into the pond. The cold water rose over his thighs, over his loins, upon his abdomen. The lower part of his body was all sunk in the hideous cold element. And the bottom was so deeply soft and uncertain, he was afraid of pitching with his mouth underneath. He could not swim, and was afraid.

He crouched a little, spreading his hands under the water and moving them round, trying to feel for her. The dead cold pond swayed upon his chest. He moved again, a little deeper, and again, with his hands underneath, he felt all around under the water. And he touched her clothing. But it evaded his fingers. He made a desperate effort to grasp it.

And so doing he lost his balance and went under, horribly, suffocating in the foul earthy water, struggling madly for a few moments. At last, after what seemed an eternity, he got his footing, rose again into the air and looked around. He gasped, and knew he was in the world. Then he looked at the water. She had risen near him. He grasped her clothing, and drawing her nearer, turned to take his way to land again.

He went very slowly, carefully, absorbed in the slow progress. He rose higher, climbing out of the pond. The water was now only about

his legs; he was thankful, full of relief to be out of the clutches of the pond. He lifted her and staggered on to the bank, out of the horror of wet, grey clay.

He laid her down on the bank. She was quite unconscious and running with water. He made the water come from her mouth, he worked to restore her. He did not have to work very long before he could feel the breathing begin again in her; she was breathing naturally. He worked a little longer. He could feel her live beneath his hands; she was coming back. He wiped her face, wrapped her in his overcoat, looked round into the dim, dark grey world, then lifted her and staggered down the bank and across the fields.

It seemed an unthinkably long way, and his burden so heavy he felt he would never get to the house. But at last he was in the stable-yard, and then in the house-yard. He opened the door and went into the house. In the kitchen he laid her down on the hearth-rug and called. The house was empty. But the fire was burning in the grate.

Then again he kneeled to attend to her. She was breathing regularly, her eyes were wide open and as if conscious, but there seemed something missing in her look. She was conscious in herself, but unconscious of her surroundings.

He ran upstairs, took blankets from a bed, and put them before the fire to warm. Then he removed her saturated, earthy-smelling clothing, rubbed her dry with a towel, and wrapped her naked in the blankets. Then he went into the dining room, to look for spirits. There was a little whisky. He drank a gulp himself, and put some into her mouth.

The effect was instantaneous. She looked full into his face, as if she had been seeing him for some time, and yet had only just become conscious of him.

"Dr. Ferguson?" she said.

"What?" he answered.

He was divesting himself of his coat, intending to find some dry clothing upstairs. He could not bear the smell of the dead, clayey water, and he was mortally afraid for his own health.

"What did I do?" she asked.

"Walked into the pond," he replied. He had begun to shudder like one sick, and could hardly attend to her. Her eyes remained full on him, he seemed to be going dark in his mind, looking back at her helplessly. The shuddering became quieter in him, his life came back to him, dark and unknowing, but strong again.

"Was I out of my mind?" she asked, while her eyes were fixed on him all the time.

"Maybe, for the moment," he replied. He felt quiet, because his strength had come back. The strange fretful strain had left him.

"Am I out of my mind now?" she asked.

"Are you?" he reflected a moment. "No," he answered truthfully. "I don't see that you are." He turned his face aside. He was afraid now, because he felt dazed, and felt dimly that her power was stronger than his, in this issue. And she continued to look at him fixedly all the time. "Can you tell me where I shall find some dry things to put on?" he asked.

"Did you dive into the pond for me?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "I walked in. But I went in overhead as well."

There was silence for a moment. He hesitated. He very much wanted to go upstairs to get into dry clothing. But there was another desire in him. And she seemed to hold him. His will seemed to have gone to sleep, and left him, standing there slack before her. But he felt warm inside himself. He did not shudder at all, though his clothes were sodden on him.

"Why did you?" she asked.

"Because I didn't want you to do such a foolish thing," he said.

"It wasn't foolish," she said, still gazing at him as she lay on the floor, with a sofa cushion under her head. "It was the right thing to do. *I* knew best, then."

"I'll go and shift these wet things," he said. But still he had not the power to move out of her presence, until she sent him. It was as if she had the life of his body in her hands, and he could not extricate himself. Or perhaps he did not want to.

Suddenly she sat up. Then she became aware of her own immediate condition. She felt the blankets about her, she knew her own limbs. For a moment it seemed as if her reason were going. She looked round, with wild eye, as if seeking something. He stood still with fear. She saw her clothing lying scattered.

"Who undressed me?" she asked, her eyes resting full and inevitable on his face.

"I did," he replied, "to bring you round."

For some moments she sat and gazed at him awfully, her lips parted.

"Do you love me, then?" she asked.

He only stood and stared at her, fascinated. His soul seemed to melt.

She shuffled forward on her knees, and put her arms round him, round his legs, as he stood there, pressing her breasts against his knees and thighs, clutching him with strange, convulsive certainty, pressing his thighs against her, drawing him to her face, her throat, as she looked up at him with flaring, humble eyes of transfiguration, triumphant in first possession.

"You love me," she murmured, in strange transport, yearning and triumphant and confident. "You love me. I know you love me, I know."

And she was passionately kissing his knees, through the wet clothing, passionately and indiscriminately kissing his knees, his legs, as if unaware of everything.

He looked down at the tangled wet hair, the wild, bare, animal shoulders. He was amazed, bewildered, and afraid. He had never thought of loving her. He had never wanted to love her. When he rescued her and restored her, he was a doctor, and she was a patient. He had had no single personal thought of her. Nay, this introduction of the personal element was very distasteful to him, a violation of his professional honour. It was horrible to have her there embracing his knees. It was horrible. He revolted from it, violently. And yet—and yet—he had not the power to break away.

She looked at him again, with the same supplication of powerful love, and that same transcendent, frightening light of triumph. In view of the delicate flame which seemed to come from her face like a light, he was powerless. And yet he had never intended to love her. He had never intended. And something stubborn in him could not give way.

"You love me," she repeated, in a murmur of deep, rhapsodic assurance. "You love me."

Her hands were drawing him, drawing him down to her. He was afraid, even a little horrified. For he had, really, no intention of loving her. Yet her hands were drawing him towards her. He put out his hand quickly to steady himself, and grasped her bare shoulder. A flame seemed to burn the hand that grasped her soft shoulder. He had no intention of loving her: his whole will was against his yielding. It was horrible. And yet wonderful was the touch of her shoulders, beautiful the shining of her face. Was she perhaps mad? He had a horror of yielding to her. Yet something in him ached also.

He had been staring away at the door, away from her. But his hand remained on her shoulder. She had gone suddenly very still. He looked down at her. Her eyes were now wide with fear, with doubt, the light was dying from her face, a shadow of terrible greyness was returning. He could not bear the touch of her eyes' question upon him, and the look of death behind the question.

With an inward groan he gave way, and let his heart yield towards her. A sudden gentle smile came on his face. And her eyes, which never left his face, slowly, slowly filled with tears. He watched the strange water rise in her eyes, like some slow fountain coming up. And his heart seemed to burn and melt away in his breast.

He could not bear to look at her any more. He dropped on his knees and caught her head with his arms and pressed her face against his throat. She was very still. His heart, which seemed to have broken, was burning with a kind of agony in his breast. And he felt her slow, hot tears wetting his throat. But he could not move.

He felt the hot tears wet his neck and the hollows of his neck, and he remained motionless, suspended through one of man's

eternities. Only now it had become indispensable to him to have her face pressed close to him; he could never let her go again. He could never let her head go away from the close clutch of his arm. He wanted to remain like that for ever, with his heart hurting him in a pain that was also life to him. Without knowing, he was looking down on her damp, soft brown hair.

Then, as it were suddenly, he smelt the horrid stagnant smell of that water. And at the same moment she drew away from him and looked at him. Her eyes were wistful and unfathomable. He was afraid of them, and he fell to kissing her, not knowing what he was doing. He wanted her eyes not to have that terrible, wistful, unfathomable look.

When she turned her face to him again, a faint delicate flush was glowing, and there was again dawning that terrible shining of joy in her eyes, which really terrified him, and yet which he now wanted to see, because he feared the look of doubt still more.

"You love me?" she said, rather faltering.

"Yes." The word cost him a painful effort. Not because it wasn't true. But because it was too newly true, the *saying* seemed to tear open again his newly-torn heart. And he hardly wanted it to be true, even now.

She lifted her face to him, and he bent forward and kissed her on the mouth, gently, with the one kiss that is an eternal pledge. And as he kissed her his heart strained again in his breast. He never intended to love her. But now it was over. He had crossed over the gulf to her, and all that he had left behind had shrivelled and become void.

After the kiss, her eyes again slowly filled with tears. She sat still, away from him, with her face drooped aside, and her hands folded in her lap. The tears fell very slowly. There was complete silence. He too sat there motionless and silent on the hearth-rug. The strange pain of his heart that was broken seemed to consume him. That he should love her? That this was love! That he should be ripped open in this way! Him, a doctor! How they would all jeer if they knew! It was agony to him to think they might know.

In the curious naked pain of the thought he looked again to her. She was sitting there drooped into a muse. He saw a tear fall, and his heart flared hot. He saw for the first time that one of her shoulders was quite uncovered, one arm bare, he could see one of her small breasts; dimly, because it had become almost dark in the room.

"Why are you crying?" he asked, in an altered voice.

She looked up at him, and behind her tears the consciousness of her situation for the first time brought a dark look of shame to her eyes.

"I'm not crying, really," she said, watching him, half frightened.

He reached his hand, and softly closed it on her bare arm.

"I love you! I love you!" he said in a soft, low vibrating voice, unlike himself.

She shrank, and dropped her head. The soft, penetrating grip of his hand on her arm distressed her. She looked up at him.

"I want to go," she said. "I want to go and get you some dry things."

"Why?" he said. "I'm all right."

"But I want to go," she said. "And I want you to change your things."

He released her arm, and she wrapped herself in the blanket, looking at him, rather frightened. And still she did not rise.

"Kiss me," she said wistfully.

He kissed her, but briefly, half in anger.

Then, after a second, she rose nervously, all mixed up in the blanket. He watched her in her confusion as she tried to extricate herself and wrap herself up so that she could walk. He watched her relentlessly, as she knew. And as she went, the blanket trailing, and as he saw a glimpse of her feet and her white leg, he tried to remember her as she was when he had wrapped her in the blanket. But then he didn't want to remember, because she had been nothing to him then, and his nature revolted from remembering her as she was when she was nothing to him.

A tumbling muffled noise from within the dark house startled him. Then he heard her voice: "There are clothes." He rose and went to the foot of the stairs, and gathered up the garments she had thrown down. Then he came back to the fire, to rub himself down and dress. He grinned at his own appearance when he had finished.

The fire was sinking, so he put on coal. The house was now quite dark, save for the light of a street-lamp that shone in faintly from beyond the holly trees. He lit the gas with matches he found on the mantelpiece. Then he emptied the pockets of his own clothes, and threw all his wet things in a heap into the scullery. After which he gathered up her sodden clothes, gently, and put them in a separate heap on the copper-top in the scullery.

It was six o'clock on the clock. His own watch had stopped. He ought to go back to the surgery. He waited, and still she did not come down. So he went to the foot of the stairs and called:

"I shall have to go."

Almost immediately he heard her coming down. She had on her best dress of black voile, and her hair was tidy, but still damp. She looked at him—and in spite of herself, smiled.

"I don't like you in those clothes," she said.

"Do I look a sight?" he answered.

They were shy of one another.

"I'll make you some tea," she said.

"No, I must go."

"Must you?" And she looked at him again with the wide, strained, doubtful eyes. And again, from the pain of his breast, he knew how he loved her. He went and bent to kiss her, gently, passionately, with his heart's painful kiss.

"And my hair smells so horrible," she murmured in distraction. "And I'm so awful, I'm so awful! Oh no, I'm too awful." And she broke into bitter, heartbroken sobbing. "You can't want to love me, I'm horrible."

"Don't be silly, don't be silly," he said, trying to comfort her, kissing her, holding her in his arms. "I want you, I want to marry you, we're going to be married, quickly, quickly—to-morrow if I can."

But she only sobbed terribly, and cried:

"I feel awful. I feel awful. I feel I'm horrible to you."

"No, I want you, I want you," was all he answered, blindly, with that terrible intonation which frightened her almost more than her horror lest he should *not* want her.

1922

Endnotes

- Note 1: Cold blood (French; literal trans.); here, calm detachment.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Servant girl.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Muzzle (French); here, face.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Grind.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Name of a public house (pub).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Gone wrong (slang).[Return to reference 6](#)

Why the Novel Matters

We have curious ideas of ourselves. We think of ourselves as a body with a spirit in it, or a body with a soul in it, or a body with a mind in it. *Mens sana in corpore sano.*¹ The years drink up the wine, and at last throw the bottle away, the body, of course, being the bottle.

It is a funny sort of superstition. Why should I look at my hand, as it so cleverly writes these words, and decide that it is a mere nothing compared to the mind that directs it? Is there really any huge difference between my hand and my brain? Or my mind? My hand is alive, it flickers with a life of its own. It meets all the strange universe in touch, and learns a vast number of things, and knows a vast number of things. My hand, as it writes these words, slips gaily along, jumps like a grasshopper to dot an *i*, feels the table rather cold, gets a little bored if I write too long, has its own rudiments of thought, and is just as much *me* as is my brain, my mind, or my soul. Why should I imagine that there is a *me* which is more *me* than my hand is? Since my hand is absolutely alive, *me* alive.

Whereas, of course, as far as I am concerned, my pen isn't alive at all. My pen *isn't me* alive. *Me* alive ends at my finger tips.

Whatever is *me* alive is *me*. Every tiny bit of my hands is alive, every little freckle and hair and fold of skin. And whatever is *me* alive is *me*. Only my finger-nails, those ten little weapons between *me* and an inanimate universe, they cross the mysterious Rubicon² between *me* alive and things like my pen, which are not alive, in my own sense.

So, seeing my hand is all alive, and *me* alive, wherein is it just a bottle, or a jug, or a tin can, or a vessel of clay, or any of the rest of that nonsense? True, if I cut it it will bleed, like a can of cherries. But then the skin that is cut, and the veins that bleed, and the bones that should never be seen, they are all just as alive as the blood that flows. So the tin can business, or vessel of clay, is just bunk.

And that's what you learn, when you're a novelist. And that's what you are very liable *not* to know, if you're a parson, or a philosopher, or a scientist, or a stupid person. If you're a parson, you talk about souls in heaven. If you're a novelist, you know that paradise is in the palm of your hand, and on the end of your nose, because both are alive; and alive, and man alive, which is more than you can say, for certain, of paradise. Paradise is after life, and I for one am not keen on anything that is *after* life. If you are a philosopher, you talk about infinity, and the pure spirit which knows all things. But if you pick up a novel, you realise immediately that infinity is just a handle to this self-same jug of a body of mine; while as for knowing, if I find my finger in the fire, I know that fire burns, with a knowledge so emphatic and vital, it leaves Nirvana³ merely a conjecture. Oh, yes, my body, me alive, *knows*, and knows intensely. And as for the sum of all knowledge, it can't be anything more than an accumulation of all the things I know in the body, and you, dear reader, know in the body.

These damned philosophers, they talk as if they suddenly went off in steam, and were then much more important than they are when they're in their shirts. It is nonsense. Every man, philosopher included, ends in his own finger-tips. That's the end of his man alive. As for the words and thoughts and sighs and aspirations that fly from him, they are so many tremulations in the ether, and not alive at all. But if the tremulations reach another man alive, he may receive them into his life, and his life may take on a new colour, like a chameleon creeping from a brown rock on to a green leaf. All very well and good. It still doesn't alter the fact that the so-called spirit, the message or teaching of the philosopher or the saint, isn't alive at all, but just a tremulation upon the ether, like a radio message. All this spirit stuff is just tremulations upon the ether. If you, as man alive, quiver from the tremulation of the ether into new life, that is because you are man alive, and you take sustenance and stimulation into your alive man in a myriad ways. But to say that the message, or the spirit which is communicated to you, is more important than

your living body, is nonsense. You might as well say that the potato at dinner was more important.

Nothing is important but life. And for myself, I can absolutely see life nowhere but in the living. Life with a capital L is only man alive. Even a cabbage in the rain is cabbage alive. All things that are alive are amazing. And all things that are dead are subsidiary to the living. Better a live dog than a dead lion. But better a live lion than a live dog. *C'est la vie!*

It seems impossible to get a saint, or a philosopher, or a scientist, to stick to this simple truth. They are all, in a sense, renegades. The saint wishes to offer himself up as spiritual food for the multitude. Even Francis of Assisi⁴ turns himself into a sort of angel-cake, of which anyone may take a slice. But an angel-cake is rather less than man alive. And poor St Francis might well apologise to his body, when he is dying: "Oh, pardon me, my body, the wrong I did you through the years!" It was no wafer,⁵ for others to eat.

The philosopher, on the other hand, because he can think, decides that nothing but thoughts matter. It is as if a rabbit, because he can make little pills, should decide that nothing but little pills matter. As for the scientist, he has absolutely no use for me so long as I am man alive. To the scientist, I am dead. He puts under the microscope a bit of dead me, and calls it me. He takes me to pieces, and says first one piece, and then another piece, is me. My heart, my liver, my stomach have all been scientifically me, according to the scientist; and nowadays I am either a brain, or nerves, or glands, or something more up-to-date in the tissue line.

Now I absolutely flatly deny that I am a soul, or a body, or a mind, or an intelligence, or a brain, or a nervous system, or a bunch of glands, or any of the rest of these bits of me. The whole is greater than the part. And therefore, I, who am man alive, am greater than my soul, or spirit, or body, or mind, or consciousness, or anything else that is merely a part of me. I am a man, and alive. I am man alive, and as long as I can, I intend to go on being man alive.

For this reason I am a novelist. And being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog.

The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. Which is more than poetry, philosophy, science, or any other book-tremulation can do.

The novel is the book of life. In this sense, the Bible is a great confused novel. You may say, it is about God. But it is really about man alive. Adam, Eve, Sarai, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, David, Bath-Sheba, Ruth, Esther, Solomon, Job, Isaiah, Jesus, Mark, Judas, Paul, Peter: what is it but man alive, from start to finish? Man alive, not mere bits. Even the Lord is another man alive, in a burning bush, throwing the tablets of stone at Moses's head.

I do hope you begin to get my idea, why the novel is supremely important, as a tremulation on the ether. Plato makes the perfect ideal being tremble in me. But that's only a bit of me. Perfection is only a bit, in the strange makeup of man alive. The Sermon on the Mount⁶ makes the selfless spirit of me quiver. But that, too, is only a bit of me. The Ten Commandments set the old Adam shivering in me, warning me that I am a thief and a murderer, unless I watch it. But even the old Adam is only a bit of me.

I very much like all these bits of me to be set trembling with life and the wisdom of life. But I do ask that the whole of me shall tremble in its wholeness, some time or other.

And this, of course, must happen in me, living.

But as far as it can happen from a communication, it can only happen when a whole novel communicates itself to me. The Bible—but *all* the Bible—and Homer, and Shakespeare: these are the supreme old novels. These are all things to all men. Which means that in their wholeness they affect the whole man alive, which is the man himself, beyond any part of him. They set the whole tree trembling with a new access of life, they do not just stimulate growth in one direction.

I don't want to grow in any one direction any more. And, if I can help it, I don't want to stimulate anybody else into some particular direction. A particular direction ends in a *cul-de-sac*. We're in a *cul-de-sac* at present.

I don't believe in any dazzling revelation, or in any supreme Word. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of the Lord shall stand for ever."² That's the kind of stuff we've drugged ourselves with. As a matter of fact, the grass withereth, but comes up all the greener for that reason, after the rains. The flower fadeth, and therefore the bud opens. But the Word of the Lord, being man-uttered and a mere vibration on the ether, becomes staler and staler, more and more boring, till at last we turn a deaf ear and it ceases to exist, far more finally than any withered grass. It is grass that renews its youth like the eagle, not any Word.

We should ask for no absolutes, or absolute. Once and for all and for ever, let us have done with the ugly imperialism of any absolute. There is no absolute good, there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute. The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another.

Me, man alive, I am a very curious assembly of incongruous parts. My yea! of today is oddly different from my yea! of yesterday. My tears of to-morrow will have nothing to do with my tears of a year ago. If the one I love remains unchanged and unchanging, I shall cease to love her. It is only because she changes and startles me into change and defies my inertia, and is herself staggered in her inertia by my changing, that I can continue to love her. If she stayed put, I might as well love the pepper pot.

In all this change, I maintain a certain integrity. But woe betide me if I try to put my finger on it. If I say of myself, I am this, I am that!—then, if I stick to it, I turn into a stupid fixed thing like a lamp-post. I shall never know wherein lies my integrity, my individuality, my me. I *can* never know it. It is useless to talk about my ego. That only means that I have made up an *idea* of myself, and that I am trying to cut myself out to pattern. Which is no good. You can cut

your cloth to fit your coat, but you can't clip bits off your living body, to trim it down to your idea. True, you can put yourself into ideal corsets. But even in ideal corsets, fashions change.

Let us learn from the novel. In the novel, the characters can do nothing but *live*. If they keep on being good, according to pattern, or bad, according to pattern, or even volatile, according to pattern, they cease to live, and the novel falls dead. A character in a novel has got to live, or it is nothing.

We, likewise, in life have got to live, or we are nothing.

What we mean by living is, of course, just as indescribable as what we mean by *being*. Men get ideas into their heads, of what they mean by Life, and they proceed to cut life out to pattern. Sometimes they go into the desert to seek God, sometimes they go into the desert to seek cash, sometimes it is wine, woman, and song, and again it is water, political reform, and votes. You never know what it will be next: from killing your neighbour with hideous bombs and gas that tears the lungs, to supporting a Foundlings' Home⁸ and preaching infinite Love, and being co-respondent in a divorce.

In all this wild welter, we need some sort of guide. It's no good inventing Thou Shalt Nots!

What then? Turn truly, honourably to the novel, and see wherein you are man alive, and wherein you are dead man in life. You may love a woman as man alive, and you may be making love to a woman as sheer dead man in life. You may eat your dinner as man alive, or as a mere masticating corpse. As man alive you may have shot at your enemy. But as a ghastly simulacrum of life you may be firing bombs into men who are neither your enemies nor your friends, but just things you are dead to. Which is criminal, when the things happen to be alive.

To be alive, to be man alive, to be whole man alive: that is the point. And at its best, the novel, and the novel supremely, can help you. It can help you not to be dead man in life. So much of a man walks about dead and a carcass in the street and house, to-day: so

much of women is merely dead. Like a pianoforte with half the notes mute.

But the novel you can see, plainly, when the man goes dead, the woman goes inert. You can develop an instinct for life, if you will, instead of a theory of right and wrong, good and bad.

In life, there is right and wrong, good and bad, all the time. But what is right in one case is wrong in another. And in the novel you see one man becoming a corpse, because of his so-called goodness, another going dead because of his so-called wickedness. Right and wrong is an instinct: but an instinct of the whole consciousness in a man, bodily, mental, spiritual at once. And only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man live, and live woman.

1936

Endnotes

- Note 1: A healthy mind in a healthy body (Latin).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: When Julius Caesar crossed the river Rubicon (near Rimini, Italy) in 49 B.C.E., in defiance of the Senate, he indicated his intention of advancing against Pompey and thus involving the country in civil war. Hence to “cross the Rubicon” means to take an important and irrevocable decision.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Buddhist theology, the extinction of the self and its desires and the attainment of perfect beatitude.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Roman Catholic saint (1181 or 1182–1226).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Host, consumed as Christ’s body in Roman Catholic Communion.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See Matthew 5:7.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Isaiah 40:8.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Orphanage.[Return to reference 8](#)

Love on the Farm¹

What large, dark hands are those at the window
Grasping in the golden light
Which weaves its way through the evening wind
At my heart's delight?

5 Ah, only the leaves! But in the west
I see a redness suddenly come
Into the evening's anxious breast—
'Tis the wound of love goes home!

The woodbine^o creeps abroad
Calling low to her lover:
10 The sunlit flirt who all the day
Has poised above her lips in play
And stolen kisses, shallow and gay
Of pollen, now has gone away—
15 She woos the moth with her sweet, low word;
And when above her his moth-wings hover
Then her bright breast she will uncover
And yield her honey-drop to her lover.

Into the yellow, evening glow
Saunters a man from the farm below;
20 Leans, and looks in at the low-built shed
Where the swallow has hung her marriage bed.
The bird lies warm against the wall.
She glances quick her startled eyes
Towards him, then she turns away
25 Her small head, making warm display
Of red upon the throat. Her terrors sway
Her out of the nest's warm, busy ball,

30 Whose plaintive cry is heard as she flies
In one blue stoop from out the sties^o
Into the twilight's empty hall.

35 Oh, water-hen, beside the rushes
Hide your quaintly scarlet blushes,
Still your quick tail, lie still as dead,
Till the distance folds over his ominous tread!

40 The rabbit presses back her ears,
Turns back her liquid, anguished eyes
And crouches low; then with wild spring
Spurts from the terror of *his* oncoming;
To be choked back, the wire ring
Her frantic effort throttling:
Piteous brown ball of quivering fears!

45 Ah, soon in his large, hard hands she dies,
And swings all loose from the swing of his walk!
Yet calm and kindly are his eyes
And ready to open in brown surprise
Should I not answer to his talk
Or should he my tears surmise.

50 I hear his hand on the latch, and rise from my chair
Watching the door open; he flashes bare
His strong teeth in a smile, and flashes his eyes
In a smile like triumph upon me; then careless-wise
He flings the rabbit soft on the table board
And comes towards me: ah! the uplifted sword
Of his hand against my bosom! and oh, the broad
55 Blade of his glance that asks me to applaud
His coming! With his hand he turns my face to him
And caresses me with his fingers that still smell grim
Of the rabbit's fur! God, I am caught in a snare!
I know not what fine wire is round my throat;

60 I only know I let him finger there
My pulse of life, and let him nose like a stoat^o
Who sniffs with joy before he drinks the blood.

65 And down his mouth comes to my mouth! and down
His bright dark eyes come over me, like a hood
Upon my mind! his lips meet mine, and a flood
Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown
Against him, die, and find death good.

1913, 1928

Endnotes

- Note 1: Called "Cruelty and Love" when first published in 1913 and "Love on the Farm" when it appeared in *Collected Poems* (1928).[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- ^o: *honeysuckle*[Return to reference ^o](#)
- ^o: *pens for animals*[Return to reference ^o](#)
- ^o: *weasel*[Return to reference ^o](#)

Piano

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the
tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who
smiles as she sings.

5 In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to
belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter
outside
And hymns in the cozy parlour, the tinkling piano our
guide.

10 So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano appassionato. ° The
glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a
child for the past.

1918

Notes

- °: *played with passion* [Return to reference °](#)

Snake

A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark
carob-tree^o

5 I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he
was at the trough before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in
the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied
down, over the edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
10 And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a
small clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack
long body,
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,
15 And I, like a second comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips,
and mused a moment,
And stooped and drank a little more,

20 Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning
 bowels of the earth
 On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna^o smoking.

 The voice of my education said to me
 He must be killed,
 For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the
 gold are venomous.

25 And voices in me said, If you were a man
 You would take a stick and break him now, and
 finish him off.

 But must I confess how I liked him,
 How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to
 drink at my water-trough
 And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless
30 Into the burning bowels of this earth?

 Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
 Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
 Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
 I felt so honoured.

35 And yet those voices:
 If you were not afraid, you would kill him!

 And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,
 But even so, honoured still more
 That he should seek my hospitality
40 From out the dark door of the secret earth.

 He drank enough
 And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has
 drunken,
 And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the
 air, so black;

Seeming to lick his lips,
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
45 And slowly turned his head,
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
And climb the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,
50 And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his
shoulders, and entered farther,
A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his
withdrawing into that horrid black hole,
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly
drawing himself after,
Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
55 I picked up a clumsy log
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him;
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind
convulsed in undignified haste,
Writhed like lightning, and was gone
60 Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the
wall-front
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with
fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed
65 human education.

And I thought of the albatross,¹
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,
 Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
 Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
 Of life.
 And I have something to expiate;
 A pettiness.

1923

Endnotes

- Note 1: In Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *Mediterranean evergreen* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *the volcano* [Return to reference °](#)

How Beastly the Bourgeois Is

How beastly the bourgeois is
especially the male of the species—

Presentable, eminently presentable—
shall I make you a present of him?

5 Isn't he handsome? Isn't he healthy? Isn't he a fine
 specimen?
Doesn't he look the fresh clean englishman, outside?
Isn't it god's own image? tramping his thirty miles a
 day
after partridges, or a little rubber ball?
wouldn't you like to be like that, well off, and quite
 the thing?

10 Oh, but wait!
Let him meet a new emotion, let him be faced with
 another man's need,
let him come home to a bit of moral difficulty, let life
 face him with a new demand on his understanding
and then watch him go soggy, like a wet meringue.
Watch him turn into a mess, either a fool or a bully.
Just watch the display of him, confronted with a new
15 demand on his intelligence,
a new life-demand.

How beastly the bourgeois is
especially the male of the species—
Nicely groomed, like a mushroom
standing there so sleek and erect and eyeable—
20

and like a fungus, living on the remains of bygone
life
sucking his life out of the dead leaves of greater life
than his own.

25 And even so, he's stale, he's been there too long.
Touch him, and you'll find he's all gone inside
just like an old mushroom, all wormy inside, and
hollow
under a smooth skin and an upright appearance.

Full of seething, wormy, hollow feelings
rather nasty—
How beastly the bourgeois is!

30 Standing in their thousands, these appearances, in
damp England
what a pity they can't all be kicked over
like sickening toadstools, and left to melt back,
swiftly
into the soil of England.

1929

T. S. ELIOT

1888–1965

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, of New England stock. He entered Harvard in 1906 and was influenced there by the anti-Romanticism of Irving Babbitt and the philosophical and critical interests of George Santayana, as well as by the enthusiastic study of Renaissance literature and of South Asian religions. He wrote his Harvard dissertation on the English idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley, whose emphasis on the private nature of individual experience, "a circle enclosed on the outside," influenced Eliot's poetry considerably. He also studied literature and philosophy in France and Germany before going to England shortly after the outbreak of World War I in 1914. He studied Greek philosophy at Oxford, taught school in London, and then obtained a position with Lloyds Bank. In 1915 he married an English writer, Vivienne Haigh-Wood, but the marriage was not a success. She suffered from poor emotional and physical health. The strain affected Eliot, too. By November 1921 distress and worry had brought him to the verge of a nervous breakdown, and on medical advice he went to recuperate in a Swiss sanatorium. Two months later he returned, pausing in Paris long enough to give his early supporter and adviser Ezra Pound the manuscript of *The Waste Land*. Eliot left his wife in 1933, and she was eventually committed against her will to a psychiatric hospital, where she died in 1947. Ten years later he married his secretary, Valerie Fletcher. In the years between his separation and

remarriage, Eliot maintained a deep correspondence with Emily Hale, a woman with whom he had fallen in chaste love while a graduate student at Harvard. Eliot's letters to Hale, located in the Princeton University library, were unsealed in 2020, after more than sixty years of restriction. They gave literary scholars and the public a new angle on Eliot's private life as he was writing his later works, including *Four Quartets* (1943).

Eliot started writing literary and philosophical reviews soon after settling in London and was assistant editor of *The Egoist* magazine from 1917 to 1919. In 1922 he founded the influential quarterly *The Criterion*, which he edited until it ceased publication in 1939. His poetry first appeared in 1915, when, at Pound's urging, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was printed in *Poetry* magazine (Chicago), and a few other short poems were published in the short-lived periodical *Blast*. His first published collection of poems was *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917); two other small collections followed in 1919 and 1920; in 1922 *The Waste Land* appeared, first in *The Criterion* in October, then in *The Dial* (in America) in November, and finally in book form. Meanwhile he was also publishing collections of his critical essays. In 1925 he joined the London publishing firm Faber & Gwyer, and he was made a director when the firm was renamed Faber & Faber. He became a British subject and joined the Church of England in 1927.

"Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." This remark, from Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), gives one clue to his poetic method from "Prufrock" through *The Waste Land*. When he settled in London he saw poetry in English as exhausted, with no verbal excitement or original craftsmanship. He sought to make poetry more subtle, more suggestive, and at the same time more precise. Like the imagists, he emphasized the necessity of clear and precise images. From the philosopher poet T.

E. Hulme and from Pound, he learned to fear what was seen as Romantic self-indulgence and vagueness, and to regard the poetic medium rather than the poet's personality as the important factor. At the same time the "hard, dry" images advocated by Hulme were not enough for him; he wanted wit, allusiveness, irony. He saw in the Metaphysical poets how wit and passion could be combined, and he saw in the French symbolists, such as Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, and Arthur Rimbaud, how an image could be both absolutely precise in what it referred to physically and endlessly suggestive in its meanings because of its relationship to other images. The combination of precision, symbolic suggestion, and ironic mockery in the poetry of the late-nineteenth-century French poet Jules Laforgue attracted and influenced him, as did Laforgue's verse technique that Eliot described in an interview as "rhyming lines of irregular length, with the rhymes coming in irregular places." He also found in the Jacobean dramatists, such as Thomas Middleton, Cyril Tourneur, and John Webster, a flexible blank verse with overtones of colloquial movement, a way of counterpointing the accent of conversation and the note of terror. Eliot's fluency in French and German, his study of Western and non-Western literary and religious texts in their original languages, his rigorous knowledge of philosophy, his exacting critical intellect, his keen sensitivity to colloquial rhythm and idiom, his ability to fuse anguished emotional states with sharply etched intellectual satire—all of these contributed to his crafting one of the twentieth century's most distinctive and influential bodies of poetry.

Hulme's protests against the Romantic concept of poetry reinforced what Eliot had learned from Babbitt at Harvard; yet for all his severity with poets such as Percy Shelley and Walt Whitman, for all his cultivation of a classical viewpoint and his insistence on order and discipline rather than on mere self-expression in art, one side of Eliot's poetic genius is Romantic. The symbolist influence on his imagery, his elegiac lamentation over loss and fragmentation, his interest in the evocative and the suggestive, lines such as "And fiddled whisper music on those strings / And bats with baby faces in

the violet light / Whistled, and beat their wings," and recurring images such as the hyacinth girl and the rose garden show what could be called a Romantic element in his poetry. But it is combined with a dry ironic allusiveness, a play of wit and satire, and a colloquial element, which are not normally found in poets of the Romantic tradition.

Eliot's real novelty—and the cause of much bewilderment when his poems first appeared—was his deliberate elimination of all merely connective and transitional passages, his building up of the total pattern of meaning through the immediate juxtaposition of images without overt explanation of what they are doing, together with his use of oblique references to other works of literature (some of them quite obscure to most readers of his time). "Prufrock" presents a symbolic landscape where the meaning emerges from the mutual interaction of the images, and that meaning is enlarged by echoes, often ironic, of Hesiod and Dante and Shakespeare. *The Waste Land* is a series of scenes and images with no author's voice intervening to tell us where we are but with the implications developed through multiple contrasts and through analogies with older literary works often referred to in a distorted quotation or half-concealed allusion. Furthermore, the works referred to are not necessarily central in the Western literary tradition: besides Dante and Shakespeare there are pre-Socratic philosophers; major and minor seventeenth-century poets and dramatists; works of anthropology, history, and philosophy; texts of Buddhism and Hinduism; even popular songs and vaudeville. Ancient and modern voices, high and low art, Western and non-Western languages clash, coincide, jostle alongside one another. In a culture where the poet's public might lack a common cultural heritage, a shared knowledge of works of the past, Eliot felt it necessary to accumulate his own body of references. In this his use of earlier literature differs from, say, John Milton's. Both poets are difficult for the modern reader, who needs editorial assistance in recognizing and understanding many of the allusions—but Milton was drawing on a body of knowledge common to educated people in his day. Nevertheless, this aspect of

Eliot can be exaggerated; his imagery and the movement of his verse set the tone he requires, establish the area of meaning to be developed, so that even a reader ignorant of most of the literary allusions can often get the feel of the poem and achieve some understanding of what it says.

Eliot's early poetry, until at least the middle 1920s, is mostly concerned in one way or another with the Waste Land, with aspects of cultural decay in the modern Western world. After his formal acceptance of Anglican Christianity, a penitential note appears in much of his verse, a note of quiet searching for spiritual peace, with considerable allusion to biblical, liturgical, and mystical religious literature and to Dante. *Ash Wednesday* (1930), a poem in six parts, much less fiercely concentrated in style than the earlier poetry, explores with gentle insistence a mood both penitential and questioning. The Ariel poems (so called because published in Faber's Ariel pamphlet series) present or explore aspects of religious doubt or discovery or revelation, sometimes, as in "Journey of the Magi," drawing on biblical incident. In *Four Quartets* (of which the first, "Burnt Norton," appeared in the *Collected Poems* of 1936, though all four were not completed until 1943, when they were published together), Eliot further explored essentially religious moods, dealing with the relation between time and eternity and the cultivation of that selfless passivity that can yield the moment of timeless revelation in the midst of time. The mocking irony, the savage humor, the collage of quotations, the deliberately startling juxtaposition of the sordid and the romantic give way in these later poems to a quieter poetic idiom that is less jagged and more abstract, less fragmentary and more formally patterned.

As a critic Eliot worked out in his reading of older literature what he needed as a poet to hold and to admire. He lent the growing weight of his authority to a shift in literary taste that replaced Milton with John Donne as the great seventeenth-century English poet and replaced Alfred, Lord Tennyson in the nineteenth century with Gerard Manley Hopkins. Rewriting English literary history, he saw the late seventeenth-century "dissociation of sensibility"—the

segregation of intellect and emotion—as determining the course of English poetry throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This theory also explained what he was aiming at in his own poetry: the reestablishment of that *unified* sensibility he found in Donne and other early seventeenth-century poets and dramatists, who were able, he suggests in “The Metaphysical Poets,” to “feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose.” His view of tradition, his dislike of the poetic exploitation of the author’s personality, his advocacy of what he called “orthodoxy,” made him suspicious of what he considered eccentric geniuses such as William Blake and D. H. Lawrence. On the other side, his dislike of the grandiloquent and his insistence on complexity and on the mingling of the formal with the conversational made him distrust Milton’s influence on English poetry. He considered himself a “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religion” (*For Lancelot Andrewes*, 1928), in favor of order against chaos, tradition against eccentricity, authority against rampant individualism; yet his own poetry is in many respects untraditional and certainly highly individual in tone. His conservative and even authoritarian habit of mind, his anti-Semitic remarks and missionary zeal, alienated some who admire—and some whose own poetry has been much influenced by—his poetry.

Eliot’s plays address, directly or indirectly, religious themes. *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) deals in an appropriately ritual manner with the killing of Archbishop Thomas à Becket, using a chorus and presenting its central speech as a sermon by the archbishop. *The Family Reunion* (1939) deals with the problem of guilt and redemption in a modern upper-class English family; combining choric devices from Greek tragedy with a poetic idiom subdued to the accents of drawing-room conversation. In his three later plays, all written in the 1950s, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk*, and *The Elder Statesman*, he achieved popular success by casting a serious religious theme in the form of a sophisticated modern social comedy, using a verse that is so

conversational in movement that when spoken in the theater it does not sound like verse at all.

Critics differ on the degree to which Eliot succeeded in his last plays in combining box-office success with dramatic effectiveness. But there is no disagreement on his importance as one of the great renovators of poetry in English, whose influence on a whole generation of poets, critics, and intellectuals was enormous. His range as a poet is limited, and his interest in the great middle ground of human experience (as distinct from the extremes of saint and sinner) deficient; but when in 1948 he was awarded the rare honor of the Order of Merit by King George VI and also gained the Nobel Prize in literature, his positive qualities were widely and fully recognized—his poetic cunning, his fine craftsmanship, his original accent, his historical importance as *the* poet of the modern symbolist-Metaphysical tradition.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
a persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
questa fiamma staria senza più scosse.
Ma per ciò che giammai di questo fondo
non tornò vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*¹

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
5 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
10 Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

15 The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-
panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the
window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from
chimneys,

20 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time²
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
25 There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands³
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
30 Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

35 In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
40 (They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the
chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a
simple pin—
(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')
Do I dare
45 Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will
reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
50 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall⁴
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all
—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
60 To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all
—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
65 That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

• • • • •

70 Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow
streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of
windows? . . .
I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas,⁵

• • • • •

75 And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
80 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and
prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
brought in upon a platter,⁶
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,
85 and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and
me,
Would it have been worth while,
90 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball⁷
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: 'I am Lazarus,⁸ come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'—
95 If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.'

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
100 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the
sprinkled streets,

After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts
that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in
105 patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
'That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.'

• • • • •

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress,⁹ start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
115 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence,¹ but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

120 I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a
peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon
the beach.
I have heard the mermaids, singing, each to each.

125 I do not think that they will sing to me.
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

130 We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

1910–11 1915, 1917

Endnotes

- Note 1:
“If I thought that my reply would be to one who would ever return to the world, this flame would stay without further movement; but since none has ever returned alive from this depth, if what I hear is true, I answer you without fear of infamy” (Dante, *Inferno* 27.61–66). Guido da Montefeltro, shut up in his flame (the punishment given to false counselors), tells the shame of his evil life to Dante because he believes Dante will never return to Earth to report it.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress,” line 1: “Had we but world enough, and time.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *Works and Days* is a poem about the farming year by the Greek poet Hesiod (8th century B.C.E.). Eliot contrasts useful agricultural labor with the futile “works and days of hands” engaged in meaningless social gesturing.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* 1.1.4: “That strain again, it had a dying fall.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, he would have been better as a crab on the ocean bed.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Like that of John the Baptist. See Mark 6:17–28 and Matthew 14:3–11.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See “To His Coy Mistress,” lines 41–44: “Let us roll all our strength and all / Our sweetness up into one ball, / And tear

our pleasures with rough strife / Thorough the iron gates of life." [Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: One Lazarus was raised by Jesus from the dead (John 11:1–44). In a parable, a different Lazarus is a beggar who goes to heaven, in contrast to a rich man who goes to hell. The rich man wishes Lazarus could return from the dead to warn the living, but his wish is refused (Luke 16:19–31). [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the Elizabethan sense of a state journey made by a royal or noble person. Elizabethan plays sometimes showed such "progresses" crossing the stage. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In its older meanings: "opinions," "sententiousness." See Chaucer's *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*, line 308. [Return to reference 1](#)

Sweeney among the Nightingales

ὦμοι, πε' πληγμαι καιρι' αν πληγη`ν ἔσω¹

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees
Letting his arms hang down to laugh,
The zebra stripes along his jaw
Swelling to maculate^o giraffe.

5 The circles of the stormy moon
Slide westward toward the River Plate,²
Death and the Raven³ drift above
And Sweeney guards the hornèd gate.⁴

10 Gloomy Orion and the Dog
Are veiled;⁵ and hushed the shrunken seas;
The person in the Spanish cape
Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees

15 Slips and pulls the table cloth
Overturns a coffee-cup,
Reorganized upon the floor
She yawns and draws a stocking up;

20 The silent man in mocha brown
Sprawls at the window-sill and gapes;
The waiter brings in oranges
Bananas figs and hothouse grapes;

The silent vertebrate in brown
Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;
Rachel née Rabinovitch
Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;

25 She and the lady in the cape
Are suspect, thought to be in league;
Therefore the man with heavy eyes
Declines the gambit, shows fatigue,

Leaves the room and reappears
30 Outside the window, leaning in,
Branches of wistaria
Circumscribe a golden grin;

The host with someone indistinct
Converses at the door apart,
35 The nightingales are singing near
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud⁶
And let their liquid sittings fall
40 To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

1918, 1919

Endnotes

- Note 1: "Alas, I am struck with a mortal blow within" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, line 1343); the voice of Agamemnon heard crying out from the palace as he is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Or Rio de la Plata, an estuary on the South American coast between Argentina and Uruguay, formed by the Uruguay and Paraná rivers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The constellation Corvus.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The gates of horn, in Hades, through which true dreams come to the upper world.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: For Sweeney and his female friend, the gate of vision is blocked and the great myth-making constellations—"Orion and

the Dog"—are "veiled."[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Agamemnon is murdered not in a "bloody wood" but in his bath. Eliot here telescopes Agamemnon's murder with the wood where, in Greek myth, Philomela was raped by her sister's husband, Tereus (she was subsequently turned into a nightingale), and also with the ancient "bloody wood" of Nemi, where the old priest was slain by his successor (as described in the first chapter of Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*).[Return to reference 6](#)

Notes

- °: *spotted, stained*[Return to reference °](#)

The Waste Land In the essay “*Ulysses, Order, and Myth*” (1923), Eliot hinted at the ambitions of *The Waste Land* when he declared that others would follow James Joyce “in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. . . . It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. . . . It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible in art.” Eliot labeled this new technique “the mythical method.”

He gave another clue to the theme and structure of *The Waste Land* in a general note, in which he stated that “not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance* [1920].” He further acknowledged a general indebtedness to Sir James Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (thirteen volumes, 1890–1915), “especially the . . . volumes *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*,” in which Frazer deals with ancient vegetation myths and fertility ceremonies. Drawing on material from Frazer and other anthropologists, Weston traces the relationship of these myths and rituals to Christianity and especially to the legend of the Holy Grail. She finds an archetypal fertility myth in the story of the Fisher King, whose death, infirmity, or impotence (there are many forms of the myth) brought drought and desolation to the land and failure of the power to reproduce themselves among both humans and beasts. This symbolic Waste Land can be revived only if a “questing knight” goes to the Chapel Perilous, situated in the heart of it, and there asks certain ritual questions about the Grail (or Cup) and the Lance—originally fertility symbols, female and male, respectively. The proper asking of these questions revives the king and restores fertility to the land. The relation of this original Grail myth to fertility cults and rituals found in many different civilizations, and represented by stories of a god who dies and is later resurrected (for instance, Tammuz, Adonis, Attis), shows their common origin in a response to the cyclical movement of the seasons, with vegetation dying in winter to be resurrected again in the spring. Christianity,

according to Weston, gave its own spiritual meaning to the myth; it “did not hesitate to utilize the already existing medium of instruction, but boldly identified the Deity of Vegetation, regarded as Life Principle, with the God of the Christian Faith.” The Fisher King is related to the use of the fish symbol in early Christianity. Weston states “with certainty that the Fish is a Life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and that the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with the Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of Life.” Eliot, following Weston, thus uses a great variety of mythological and religious material, both Western and Eastern, to paint a symbolic picture of the modern Waste Land and the need for regeneration. He vividly presents the terror of that desiccated life—its loneliness, emptiness, and irrational apprehensions—as well as its misuse of sexuality, but he paradoxically ends the poem with a benediction. The mass death and social collapse of World War I inform the poem’s vision of a Waste Land strewn with corpses, wreckage, and ruin. Another significant general source for the poem is the German composer Richard Wagner’s operas *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*), *Parsifal*, *Das Rheingold*, and *Tristan und Isolde*.

The poem as published owes a great deal to the severe pruning by Ezra Pound; the original manuscript, with Pound’s excisions and comments, provides fascinating information about the genesis and development of the poem, and was reproduced in facsimile in 1971, edited by Eliot’s widow, Valerie Eliot. Reprinted below is the text as first published in book form in December 1922, including Eliot’s notes, which are supplemented by the present editors’ notes.

The Waste Land

"NAM Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis
meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri
dicerent: σι´βυλλα τι´ Θε´λεισ; respondebat illa:
ἀποθανεῖν Θε´λω."¹

FOR EZRA POUND

*il miglior fabbro*²

I. The Burial of the Dead³

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
5 Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the
Starnbergersee⁴
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,⁵
10 And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt
deutsch.⁶
And when we were children, staying at the
archduke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
15 Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.

I read, much of the night, and go south in the
winter.

20 What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,⁷
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no
relief,⁸
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
25 There is shadow under this red rock,⁹
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
30 I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

*Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu,
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?*¹

35 "You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth²
garden,
Yours arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
40 Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer.³

Madame Sosostri⁴s, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,

45 With a wicked pack of cards.⁵ Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,⁶
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna,⁷ the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
50 Here is the man with three staves, and here the
Wheel,⁸
And here is the one-eyed merchant,⁹ and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man.¹ Fear death by water.
55 I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

60 Unreal City.²
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,³
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,⁴
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
65 Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.⁵
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying:
"Stetson!"⁶
70 "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!⁷
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"Has it begun to sprout?⁸ Will it bloom this year?
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
75 "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!⁹

“You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable—mon frère!”¹

Endnotes

- Note 3: The title comes from the Anglican burial service.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4:
Lake a few miles south of Munich, where the “mad” King Ludwig II of Bavaria drowned in 1886 in mysterious circumstances. This romantic, melancholy king passionately admired Richard Wagner and especially Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde*, which plays a significant part in *The Waste Land*. Ludwig’s suffering of “death by water” in the Starnbergersee thus evokes a cluster of themes central to the poem. Eliot had met King Ludwig’s second cousin Countess Marie Larisch and talked with her. Although he had probably not read the countess’s book *My Past*, which discusses King Ludwig at length, he got information about her life and times from her in person, and the remarks made in lines 8–18 are hers.
[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A small public park in Munich.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania, a true German (German).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Cf. Ezekiel II, i [*Eliot’s note*]. God, addressing Ezekiel, continues: “stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cf. Ecclesiastes XII, v [*Eliot’s note*]. The verse Eliot cites is part of the preacher’s picture of the desolation of old age, “when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See Isaiah 32:2: the “righteous king” “shall be . . . as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a

weary land.”[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: V. [see] *Tristan und Isolde*, I, verses 5–8 [*Eliot’s note*]. In Wagner’s opera a sailor recalls the girl he has left behind: “Fresh blows the wind to the homeland; my Irish child, where are you waiting?”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Name of a young man loved and accidentally killed by Apollo in Greek mythology; from his blood sprang the flower named for him, inscribed with “AI,” a cry of grief.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Id. [Ibid] III, verse 24 [*Eliot’s note*]. In act 3 of *Tristan und Isolde*, Tristan lies dying. He is waiting for Isolde to come to him from Cornwall, but a shepherd, appointed to watch for her sail, can report only, “Waste and empty is the sea.” *Oed’* (or *Öd’*) was originally misspelled *Od’*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A mock Egyptian name (suggested to Eliot by “Sesostris, the Sorceress of Ecbatana,” the name assumed by a character in Aldous Huxley’s novel *Crome Yellow* [1921] who dresses up as a gypsy to tell fortunes at a fair).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
That is, the deck of Tarot cards. The four suits of the Tarot pack, discussed by Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*, are the cup, lance, sword, and dish—the life symbols found in the Grail story. Weston noted that “today the Tarot has fallen somewhat into disrepute, being principally used for purposes of divination.” Some of the cards mentioned in lines 46–56 are discussed by Eliot in his note to this passage: “I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the ‘crowds of people,’ and Death by Water is executed in part IV.

The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself."

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6:

See part IV. Phlebas the Phoenician and Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant—both of whom appear later in the poem—are different phases of the same symbolic character, here identified as the "Phoenician Sailor." Mr. Eugenides exports "currants" (line 210); the drowned Phlebas floats in the "current" (line 315).

Line 48 draws from Ariel's song in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1.2.400–08) to the shipwrecked Ferdinand, who was "sitting on a bank / Weeping again the King my father's wrack," when "this music crept by me on the waters." The song is about the supposed drowning of Ferdinand's father, Alonso. *The Waste Land* contains many references to *The Tempest*. Ferdinand is associated with Phlebas and Mr. Eugenides and, therefore, with the "drowned Phoenician Sailor."

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Beautiful lady (Italian). The word also suggests Madonna (the Virgin Mary) and, therefore, the Madonna of the Rocks (as in Leonardo da Vinci's painting); the rocks symbolize the Church. Belladonna is also an eye cosmetic and a poison—the deadly nightshade. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the wheel of fortune, whose turning represents the reversals of human life. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, Mr. Eugenides, "one-eyed" because the figure is in profile on the card. Unlike the man with three staves and the wheel, which are Tarot cards, he is Eliot's creation. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: On his card in the Tarot pack he is shown hanging by one foot from a T-shaped cross. He symbolizes the self-sacrifice of the fertility god who is killed so that his resurrection may restore fertility to land and people. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
Cf. Baudelaire: "Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves, / Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant" [*Eliot's note*]. The

lines are quoted from "Les Sept Vieillards" ("The Seven Old Men") of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), by the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867): "Swarming city, city full of dreams, / Where the specter in broad daylight accosts the passerby." The word *rêve* was originally misspelled *rève*.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Cf. Inferno III, 55–57 [*Eliot's note*]. The note goes on to quote Dante's lines, which may be translated: "So long a train of people, / that I should never have believed / That death had undone so many." Dante, just outside the gate of hell, has seen "the wretched souls of those who lived without disgrace and without praise." [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cf. Inferno IV, 25–27 [*Eliot's note*]. In Limbo, the first circle of hell, Dante has found the virtuous heathens, who lived before Christianity and are, therefore, eternally unable to achieve their desire of seeing God. Dante's lines, cited by Eliot, mean "Here, so far as I could tell by listening, / there was no lamentation except sighs, / which caused the eternal air to tremble." [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A phenomenon which I have often noticed [*Eliot's note*]. St. Mary Woolnoth is a church in the City of London (the financial district); the crowd is flowing across London Bridge to work in the City. According to the Bible, Jesus died at the ninth hour. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Presumably representing the "average businessman." [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Battle of Mylae (260 B.C.E.) in the First Punic War, which, in some measure like World War I, was fought for economic reasons. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A distortion of the fertility god's ritual death, which heralded rebirth. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cf. the Dirge in Webster's *White Devil* [*Eliot's note*]. In the play by John Webster (d. 1625), the dirge, sung by Cornelia, has the lines "But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men, / For with his nails he'll dig them up again." Eliot makes the "wolf"

into a “dog,” which is not a foe but a friend to humans.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1:

V. Baudelaire, Preface to *Fleurs du Mal* [*Eliot's note*]. The passage is the last line of the introductory poem “Au Lecteur” (“To the Reader”), in Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal*; it may be translated: “Hypocrite reader!—my likeness—my brother!” “Au Lecteur” describes humans as sunk in stupidity, sin, and evil, but the worst in “each man’s foul menagerie of sin” is boredom, the “*monstre délicat*”—“You know him; reader.”

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 1:

From the *Satyricon* of Petronius (1st century C.E.): “For once I myself saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her ‘Sibyl, what do you want?’ she replied, ‘I want to die.’ ” (The Greek may be transliterated, “Síbýlla tí théleis?” and “apothanéin thélo.”) The Cumaean Sibyl was the most famous of the Sibyls, the prophetic old women of Greek mythology; she guided Aeneas through Hades in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. She had been granted immortality by Apollo, but because she forgot to ask for perpetual youth, she shrank into withered old age and her authority declined.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The better craftsman (Italian); a tribute originally paid to the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel in Dante’s *Purgatorio* 26.117. Ezra Pound (1885–1972), American expatriate poet who was a key figure in the modern movement in poetry, helped Eliot massively revise the manuscript.[Return to reference 2](#)

II. A Game of Chess²

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,³
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
80 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
85 In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
90 In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,⁴
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured
95 stone,
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene⁵
The change of Philomel,⁶ by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
100 Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
"Jug Jug"⁷ to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
105 Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.

Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

110

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley⁸
Where the dead men lost their bones.

115

"What is that noise?"

The wind under the door.⁹

"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.

120

"Do

"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you
remember
"Nothing?"

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.¹
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your
head?"

125

But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag²—
It's so elegant
So intelligent

130

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do
tomorrow?
"What shall we ever do?"

The hot water at ten.
135 And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,³
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon
the door.

When Lil's husband got demobbed,⁴ I said—
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
140 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME⁵
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money
he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
145 He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good
time,
And if you dont give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
150 Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a
straight look.
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
If you dont like it you can get on with it, I said,
Others can pick and choose if you can't.
But if Albert makes off, it wont be for lack of telling.
155 You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off,⁶ she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young
160 George.)
The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never
been the same.
You *are* a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert wont leave you alone, there it is, I
 said,
 What you get married for if you dont want children?
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 165 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot
 gammon,^o
 And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of
 it hot—
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
 170 Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May.
 Goonight.
 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good
 night, good night.⁷

Endnotes

- Note 2: The title suggests two plays by Thomas Middleton (1580–1627): *A Game at Chess* and, more significant, *Women Beware Women*, which has a scene in which a mother-in-law is distracted by a game of chess while her daughter-in-law is seduced: every move in the chess game represents a move in the seduction. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cf. *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, ii, 1. 190 [*Eliot's note*]. In Shakespeare's play, Enobarbus's famous description of the first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra begins, "The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne, / Burn'd on the water." Eliot's language in the opening lines of part 2 echoes ironically Enobarbus's speech. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Laquearia. V. *Aeneid*, I, 726 [*Eliot's note*]. *Laquearia* means "a paneled ceiling," and Eliot's note quotes the passage in the *Aeneid* that was his source for the word. The passage may be translated: "Blazing torches hang from the gold-paneled ceiling [*laquearibus aureis*], and torches conquer the night with

flames.” Virgil is describing the banquet given by Dido, queen of Carthage, for Aeneas, with whom she fell in love.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Sylvan scene. V. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV, 140 [*Eliot’s note*]. The phrase is part of the first description of Eden, seen through Satan’s eyes.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: V. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI, Philomela [*Eliot’s note*]. Philomela was raped by “the barbarous king” Tereus, husband of her sister, Procne. Philomela was then transformed into a nightingale. Eliot’s note for line 100 refers ahead to his elaboration of the nightingale’s song.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Conventional representation of nightingale’s song in Elizabethan poetry.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Cf. Part III, 1. 195 [*Eliot’s note*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cf. Webster: “Is the wind in that door still?” [*Eliot’s note*]. In John Webster’s *The Devil’s Law Case* (3.2.162), a physician asks this question on finding that the victim of a murderous attack is still breathing, meaning “Is he still alive?”[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Cf. Part I, 1. 37, 48 [*Eliot’s note*].[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: American ragtime song; a hit of Ziegfeld’s Follies in 1912. The chorus is “That Shakespearian Rag, most intelligent, very elegant.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cf. the game of chess in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women* [*Eliot’s note*]. The significance of this chess game is discussed in the first note to part 2.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: British slang for *demobilized*—discharged from the army, particularly after World War I.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The traditional call of the British bartender at closing time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The “chemist” (line 161) is a pharmacist. To cause an abortion.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See the mad Ophelia’s departing words (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 4.5.69–70). Ophelia, too, met “death by water.” See also the popular song lyric “Good night ladies, we’re going to leave you now.”[Return to reference 7](#)

Notes

- °: *ham, bacon* [Return to reference °](#)

III. The Fire Sermon⁸

175 The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are
departed.

Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song,⁹
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs
are departed.

180 And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept,¹ . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or
long.

185 But at my back in a cold blast I hear²
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear
to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
190 Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him,³
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.

195 But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors,⁴ which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.⁵
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter

200 And on her daughter
 They wash their feet in soda water⁶
*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!*⁷

Twit twit twit
 Jug jug jug jug jug jug
 So rudely forc'd.
 205 Tereu⁸

Unreal City
 Under the brown fog of a winter noon
 Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna⁹ merchant
 Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
 210 C.i.f.¹ London: documents at sight,
 Asked me in demotic⁰ French
 To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
 Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.²

215 At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
 Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine
 waits
 Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
 I Tiresias,³ though blind, throbbing between two
 lives,
 Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
 At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
 220 Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,⁴
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast,
 lights
 Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
 Out of the window perilously spread
 Her drying combinations⁰ touched by the sun's last
 225 rays,
 On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
 Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.⁰

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
230 He, the young man carbuncular,⁰ arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford⁵ millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
235 The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
240 His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes⁶ below the wall
245 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
250 Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
255 And puts a record on the gramophone.⁷

"This music crept by me upon the waters"⁸
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City, City, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,

260 The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
265 Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.⁹

The river sweats¹
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
270 Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
275 Past the Isle of Dogs.²
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester³
Beating oars
280 The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
285 Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
290 Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

"Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew

295 Undid me.⁴ By Richmond I raised my knees
 Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

 "My feet are at Moorgate,⁵ and my heart
 Under my feet. After the event
 He wept. He promised 'a new start.'
 I made no comment. What should I resent?"

 300 "On Margate⁶ Sands.
 I can connect
 Nothing with nothing.
 The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
 My people humble people who expect
 Nothing."
 305 la la

 To Carthage then I came⁷

 Burning burning burning burning⁸
 O Lord Thou pluckest me out⁹
 O Lord Thou pluckest
 310 burning

Endnotes

- Note 8: The Buddha preached the Fire Sermon, against the fires of lust and other passions that destroy people and prevent their regeneration. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: V. Spenser, *Prothalamion* [*Eliot's note*]. Eliot's line is the refrain from Edmund Spenser's marriage song, which is also set by the river Thames in London. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See Psalms 137:1, in which the exiled Hebrews mourn for their homeland: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." Lake Leman

is another name for Lake Geneva, in Switzerland; Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* in Lausanne, by that lake. The noun *leman* is an archaic word meaning lover.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: An ironic distortion of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," lines 21–22: "But at my back I always hear / Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near." See lines 196–97.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Cf. *The Tempest*, I, ii [*Eliot's note*]. See line 48.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cf. Marvell, *To His Coy Mistress* [*Eliot's note*].[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cf. Day, *Parliament of Bees*: "When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear, / A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring / Actaeon to Diana in the spring, / Where all shall see her naked skin" [*Eliot's note*]. Actaeon was changed to a stag and hunted to death after he saw Diana, the goddess of chastity, bathing with her nymphs. John Day (1574–ca. 1640), English poet.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken; it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia [*Eliot's note*]. One of the less bawdy versions of the song, which was popular among Australian troops in World War I, went as follows: "O the moon shines bright on Mrs. Porter / And on the daughter / Of Mrs. Porter. / They wash their feet in soda water / And so they oughter / To keep them clean."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: V. Verlaine, *Parsifal* [*Eliot's note*]: "And O those children's voices singing in the dome!" The sonnet by the French poet Paul Verlaine (1844–1896) describes Parsifal, the questing knight, resisting all sensual temptations to keep himself pure for the Grail and heal the Fisher King; Wagner's Parsifal had his feet washed before entering the castle of the Grail.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A reference to Tereus, who "rudely forc'd" Philomela; it was also a word for a nightingale's song in Elizabethan poetry. See the song from John Lyly's *Campaspe* (1584): "Oh, 'tis the

ravished nightingale. / *Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu!* she cries." See also lines 100ff.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: Now Izmir, a seaport in western Turkey; here associated with Carthage and the ancient Phoenician and Syrian merchants, who spread the old mystery cults.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The currants were quoted at a price "carriage and insurance free to London"; and the Bill of Lading etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of the sight draft [*Eliot's note*]. Another gloss of *C.i.f.* is "cost, insurance and freight."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Luxury hotel in the seaside resort of Brighton. Cannon Street Hotel, near the station that was then chief terminus for travelers to the Continent, was a favorite meeting place for businesspeople going or coming from abroad; it was also a locale for homosexual liaisons.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:
Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest [*Eliot's note*]. The note then quotes, from the Latin text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the story of Tiresias's change of sex: "[The story goes that once Jove, having drunk a great deal,] jested with Juno. He said, 'Your pleasure in love is really greater than that enjoyed by men.' She denied it; so they decided to seek the opinion of the wise Tiresias, for he knew both aspects of love. For once, with a blow of his staff, he had committed violence on two huge snakes as they copulated in the green forest; and—wonderful to tell—was turned from a man into a woman and thus spent seven years. In the eighth year he saw the same snakes again and said: 'If a blow struck at you is so

powerful that it changes the sex of the giver, I will now strike at you again.' With these words she struck the snakes, and again became a man. So he was appointed arbitrator in the playful quarrel, and supported Jove's statement. It is said that Saturnia [that is, Juno] was quite disproportionately upset, and condemned the arbitrator to perpetual blindness. But the almighty father (for no god may undo what has been done by another god), in return for the sight that was taken away, gave him the power to know the future and so lightened the penalty paid by the honor."

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4:

This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the "longshore" or "dory" fisherman, who returns at nightfall [*Eliot's note*]. Sappho's poem addressed Hesperus, the evening star, as the star that brings everyone home from work to evening rest; her poem is here distorted by Eliot. There is also an echo of the 19th-century Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson's "Requiem," line 221: "Home is the sailor, home from sea."

[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Either the Yorkshire woolen manufacturing town, where many fortunes were made in World War I, or the pioneer oil town of Bradford, Pennsylvania, the home of one of Eliot's wealthy Harvard contemporaries, T. E. Hanley.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: For many generations, Tiresias lived in Thebes, where he witnessed the tragic fates of Oedipus and Creon; he prophesied in the marketplace by the wall of Thebes.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7:

V. Goldsmith, the song in *The Vicar of Wakefield* [*Eliot's note*]. Olivia, a character in Oliver Goldsmith's 1766 novel, sings the following song when she returns to the place where she was seduced: "When lovely woman stoops to folly / And finds too late that men betray / What charm can soothe her melancholy, /

What art can wash her guilt away? / The only art her guilt to cover, / To hide her shame from every eye, / To give repentance to her lover / And wring his bosom—is to die.”

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: V. *The Tempest*, as above [*Eliot's note*]. See line 48. The line is from Ferdinand's speech, continuing after “weeping again the King my father's wrack.” [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The interior of St. Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among [Sir Christopher] Wren's interiors. See *The Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches*: (P. S. King & Son, Ltd.) [*Eliot's note*]. In these lines the “pleasant” music, the “fishmen” resting after labor, and the splendor of the church interior suggest a world of true values, where work and relaxation are both real and take place in a context of religious meaning. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:
The Song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 inclusive they speak in turn. V. *Götterdämmerung*, III, i: the Rhinedaughters [*Eliot's note*]. Eliot parallels the Thames-daughters with the Rhinemaidens in Wagner's opera *Götterdämmerung* (*The Twilight of the Gods*), who lament that, with the gold of the Rhine stolen, the beauty of the river is gone. The refrain in lines 277–78 is borrowed from Wagner.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Greenwich is a borough in London on the south side of the Thames; opposite is the Isle of Dogs (a peninsula). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:
The fruitless love of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Leicester (Robert Dudley) is recalled in Eliot's note: “V. [J. A.] Froude, *Elizabeth*, Vol. I, ch. iv, letter of De Quadra to Philip of Spain: ‘In the afternoon we were in a barge, watching the games on the river. (The queen) was alone with Lord Robert and myself on the poop, when they began to talk nonsense, and went so far that Lord Robert at last said, as I was on the spot there was no

reason why they should not be married if the queen pleased.' " Queen Elizabeth I was born in the old Greenwich House, by the river, where Greenwich Hospital now stands.

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Cf. *Purgatorio*, V, 133 [*Eliot's note*]. The *Purgatorio* lines, which Eliot here parodies, may be translated: "Remember me, who am La Pia. / Siena made me, Maremma undid me." "Highbury": a residential London suburb. "Richmond": a pleasant part of London westward up the Thames, with boating and riverside hotels. "Kew": adjoining Richmond, has the famous Kew Gardens.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Underground (that is, subway) station Eliot used daily while working at Lloyds Bank.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Popular seaside resort on the Thames estuary.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: V. St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "to Carthage then I came, where a caldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears" [*Eliot's note*]. The passage from the *Confessions* quoted here occurs in St. Augustine's account of his youthful life of lust. See line 92 and its note.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:
The complete text of the Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in the late Henry Clarke Warren's *Buddhism in Translation* (Harvard Oriental Series). Mr. Warren was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the occident [*Eliot's note*]. In the sermon, the Buddha instructs his priests that all things "are on fire. . . . The eye . . . is on fire; forms are on fire; eye-consciousness is on fire; impressions received by the eye are on fire; and whatever sensation, pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent, originates in dependence on impressions received by the eye, that also is on fire. And with what are these on fire? With the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation." For Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, see Matthew 5–7.

[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: From St. Augustine's *Confessions* again. The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident [*Eliot's note*]. [Return to reference 9](#)

Notes

- °: *colloquial* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *undergarments* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *corset* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pimply* [Return to reference °](#)

IV. Death by Water¹

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

315 A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

 Gentile or Jew
320 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall
as you.

V. What the Thunder Said²

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
325 Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead³
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

330
Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
335 Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock

Dead mountain mouth of carious^o teeth that cannot
 spit
 Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
 340 There is not even silence in the mountains
 But dry sterile thunder without rain
 There is not even solitude in the mountains
 But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
 From doors of mudcracked houses
 345 If there were water
 And no rock
 If there were rock
 And also water
 And water
 350 A spring
 A pool among the rock
 If there were the sound of water only
 Not the cicada⁴
 And dry grass singing
 355 But sound of water over a rock
 Where the hermit-thrush⁵ sings in the pine trees
 Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
 But there is no water

 360 Who is the third who walks always beside you?⁶
 When I count, there are only you and I together
 But when I look ahead up the white road
 There is always another one walking beside you
 Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
 I do not know whether a man or a woman
 365 —But who is that on the other side of you?

 What is that sound high in the air?⁷
 Murmur of maternal lamentation
 Who are those hooded hordes swarming
 Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth

370 Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
375 Vienna London
Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
380 Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and
385 exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.⁸
It has no windows, and the door swings,
390 Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico⁹
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain
395

Ganga¹ was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.²
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
400 DA³

Datta: what have we given?
 My friend, blood shaking my heart
 The awful daring of a moment's surrender
 Which an age of prudence can never retract
 405 By this, and this only, we have existed
 Which is not to be found in our obituaries
 Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider⁴
 Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor^o
 In our empty rooms
 410 DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key⁵
 Turn in the door once and turn once only
 We think of the key, each in his prison
 Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
 415 Only at nightfall, æthereal rumours
 Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus⁶
 DA
Damyata: The boat responded
 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
 420 The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
 Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
 To controlling hands

 I sat upon the shore
 Fishing⁷ with the arid plain behind me
 425 Shall I at least set my lands in order?⁸

 London Bridge is falling down falling down falling
 down⁹
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*¹
*Quando fiam uti chelidon*²—O swallow swallow³
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*⁴
 430 These fragments I have shored against my ruins
 Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.⁵
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

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Endnotes

- Note 1: This section has been interpreted as signifying death by water without resurrection or as symbolizing the sacrificial death that precedes rebirth.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book), and the present decay of eastern Europe [*Eliot's note*]. On the journey to Emmaus, the resurrected Jesus walks alongside and converses with two disciples, who think he is a stranger until he reveals his identity (Luke 24:13–14).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: These lines allude to Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, his trial, and his crucifixion.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Ecclesiastes' prophecy "the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail." See also line 23 and its note.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
This is *Turdus aonalaschkae pallasii*, the hermit-thrush which I have heard in Quebec County. Chapman says (*Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*) "it is most at home in secluded woodland and thickety retreats. . . . Its notes are not remarkable for variety or volume, but in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation they are unequalled." Its "water-dripping song" is justly celebrated [*Eliot's note*].
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:
The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was *one more member* than could actually be counted [*Eliot's*

note]. This reminiscence is associated with Jesus's unrecognized presence on the way to Emmaus.

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7:

Eliot's note for lines 367–77 is: "Cf. Herman Hesse, *Blick ins Chaos* ["A Glimpse into Chaos"]." The note then quotes a passage from the German text, which is translated: "Already half of Europe, already at least half of Eastern Europe, on the way to Chaos, drives drunk in sacred infatuation along the edge of the precipice, sings drunkenly, as though hymn singing, as Dmitri Karamazov [in Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*] sang. The offended bourgeois laughs at the songs; the saint and the seer hear them with tears."

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Suggesting the moment of near despair before the Chapel Perilous, when the questing knight sees nothing there but decay. This illusion of nothingness is the knight's final test.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The crowing of the cock signals the departure of ghosts and evil spirits. See *Hamlet* 1.1.157ff. In Matthew 26, 34, and 74 the cock crows after Peter betrays Jesus three times.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Sanskrit name for the major sacred river in India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, snowy mountain (Sanskrit); usually applied to the Himalayas.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:
Datta, dayadhvam, damyata (Give, sympathize, control). The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the *Brihadaranyaka—Upanishad*, 5, 1. A translation is found in Deussen's *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda*, p. 489 [*Eliot's note*]. In the Old Indian fable "The Three Great Disciplines," the Creator God Prajapati utters the enigmatic syllable *DA* to three groups. Lesser gods, naturally unruly, interpret it as "Control yourselves" (*Damyata*); humans, naturally greedy, as "Give" (*Datta*); demons, naturally cruel, as "Be compassionate" (*Dayadhvam*);

"That very thing is repeated even today by the heavenly voice, in the form of thunder as 'DA' 'DA' 'DA,' which means 'Control yourselves,' 'Give,' and 'Have compassion.' Therefore one should practice these three things: self-control, giving, and mercy." The Upanishads are ancient philosophical dialogues in Sanskrit. They are primary texts for an early form of Hinduism sometimes called Brahminism.

[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Cf. Webster, *The White Devil*, V, vi: ". . . they'll remarry / Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider / Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs" [*Eliot's note*]. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
Cf. *Inferno*, XXXIII, 46 [*Eliot's note*]. In this passage from the *Inferno*, Ugolino recalls his imprisonment in the tower with his children, where they starved to death: "And I heard below the door of the horrible tower being nailed shut." Eliot's note for this line goes on to quote F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 346: " 'My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul.' " Eliot wrote his doctoral thesis on Bradley's philosophy.
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Coriolanus, who acted out of pride rather than duty, exemplifies a man locked in the prison of himself. He led the enemy against his native city out of injured pride (see Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*). [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: V. Weston: *From Ritual to Romance*; chapter on the Fisher King [*Eliot's note*]. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: See Isaiah 38:1: "Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live." [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: One of the later lines of this nursery rhyme is "Take the key and lock her up, my fair lady."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1:
V. *Purgatorio*, XXVI, 148 [*Eliot's note*]. The note goes on to quote lines 145–148 of the *Purgatorio*, in which the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel addresses Dante: " 'Now I pray you, by that virtue which guides you to the summit of the stairway, be mindful in due time of my pain.' " Then (in the line Eliot quotes here) "he hid himself in the fire which refines them."
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
V. *Pervigilium Veneris*. Cf. Philomela in parts II and III [*Eliot's note*]. The Latin phrase in the text, originally misquoting *uti* as *ceu*, means, "When shall I be as the swallow?" It comes from the late Latin poem "*Pervigilium Veneris*" ("Vigil of Venus"): "When will my spring come? When shall I be as the swallow that I may cease to be silent? I have lost the Muse in silence, and Apollo regards me not."
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See A. C. Swinburne's "Itylus," which begins, "Swallow, my sister, O sister swallow, / How can thine heart be full of spring?" and Tennyson's lyric in *The Princess*: "O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying south."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: V. Gerard de Nerval, Sonnet *El Desdichado* [*Eliot's note*]. The French line may be translated: "The Prince of Aquitaine in the ruined tower." One of the cards in the Tarot pack is "the tower struck by lightning."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
V. Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* [*Eliot's note*]. Subtitled *Hieronimo's Mad Againe*, Kyd's play (1594) is an early example of the Elizabethan tragedy of revenge. Hieronimo, driven mad by the murder of his son, has his revenge when he is asked to write a court entertainment. He replies, "Why then Ile fit you!" (that is, accommodate you), and assigns the parts in the entertainment so that, in the course of the action, his son's murderers are killed.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. "The Peace which passeth understanding" is a feeble translation of the content of this word [*Eliot's note*]. On the Upanishads see the note to line 401 above. [Return to reference 6](#)

Notes

- °: *decayed* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *lawyer* [Return to reference °](#)

The Hollow Men

Mistah Kurtz—he dead¹

A penny for the Old Guy²

I

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
5 Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
10 In our dry cellar³

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
15 Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death's dream kingdom⁴

20 These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
25 In the wind's singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death's dream kingdom
30 Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field⁵
Behaving as the wind behaves
35 No nearer—

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom⁶

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
40 Here the stone images⁷
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this
45 In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss

50 Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
55 This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
60 Gathered on this beach of the tumid river⁸

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose⁹
Of death's twilight kingdom
65 The hope only
Of empty men.

V

*Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
70 At five o'clock in the morning.¹*

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act²
75 Falls the Shadow³

*For Thine is the Kingdom*⁴

80 Between the conception
 And the creation
 Between the emotion
 And the response
 Falls the Shadow
 Life is very long

85 Between the desire
 And the spasm
 Between the potency
 And the existence
 Between the essence
 And the descent
90 Falls the Shadow
 For Thine is the Kingdom

 For Thine is
 Life is
 For Thine is the
95 *This is the way the world ends*
 This is the way the world ends
 This is the way the world ends
 Not with a bang but a whimper.

1924–251925

Endnotes

- Note 1: From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (see p. 121).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Every year on Nov. 5, British children build bonfires, on which they burn a scarecrow effigy of the traitor Guido [Guy] Fawkes, who in 1605 attempted to blow up the Parliament

buildings. For some days before this, they ask people in the streets for pennies with which to buy fireworks.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: See *The Waste Land*, lines 115 and 195.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: At the end of Dante's *Purgatorio* and in *Paradiso* 4, he cannot meet the gaze of Beatrice (see Eliot's 1929 essay "Dante"). In some printings, Part II ends with an additional line: "With eyes I dare not meet in dreams."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The traditional British scarecrow is made from two sticks tied in the form of a cross (the vertical one stuck in the ground), dressed in cast-off clothes, and sometimes draped with dead vermin.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perhaps a reference to Dante's meeting with Beatrice after he has crossed the river Lethe. There reminded of his sins, he is allowed to proceed to Paradise (*Purgatorio* 30).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See *The Waste Land*, line 22.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Dante's Acheron, which encircles hell, and the Congo of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The image of heaven in Dante's *Paradiso* 32.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Parodic version of the children's rhyme ending "Here we go round the mulberry bush / On a cold and frosty morning."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 2.1.63–65: "Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Ernest Dowson's "*Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae*," lines 1–2: "Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine / There fell thy shadow, Cynara!"[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See the Lord's Prayer.[Return to reference 4](#)

Journey of the Magi¹

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'²
5 And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
10 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and
women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of
shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
15 A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.
20

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water mill beating the
darkness,
And three trees on the low sky³

25 And an old white horse galloped away in the
 meadow.
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the
 lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we continued
30 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

 All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
35 This: were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and
 death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
40 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

1927

Endnotes

- Note 1: One of the wise men who came from the east to Jerusalem to do homage to the infant Jesus (Matthew 2:1–12) is recalling in old age the meaning of the experience. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Adapted from a passage in a 1622 Christmas sermon by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes: "A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey in. The ways deep, the

weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, *in solstitio brumali*, 'the very dead of winter.' "[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The "three trees" suggest the three crosses, with Jesus crucified on the center one; the men "dicing for pieces of silver" (line 27) suggest the soldiers dicing for Jesus's garments and Judas's betrayal of him for thirty pieces of silver; the empty wineskins recall one of Jesus's parables of old and new (Mark 2:22).[Return to reference 3](#)

FROM FOUR QUARTETS

Little Gidding¹

I

Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal^o though sodden towards sundown,
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic,
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
5 In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or
brazier,
10 Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire²
In the dark time of the year. Between melting and
freezing
The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell
Or smell of living thing. This is the springtime
But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom
15 Of snow, a bloom more sudden
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
Not in the scheme of generation.
Where is the summer, the unimaginable
Zero summer?
20 If you came this way,
Taking the route you would be likely to take

From the place you would be likely to come from,
If you came this way in may time, you would find
the hedges
White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.
It would be the same at the end of the journey,
25 If you came at night like a broken king,³
If you came by day not knowing what you came for,
It would be the same, when you leave the rough
road
And turn behind the pig-sty to the dull façade
And the tombstone. And what you thought you came
30 for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is
fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment. There are other places
35 Which also are the world's end, some at the sea
jaws,
Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city⁴—
But this is the nearest, in place and time,
Now and in England.

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
40 At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put
off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
45 Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation

Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice
praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
50 Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the
language of the living.
Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

II

Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
55 Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.⁵
Dust inbreathed was a house—
The wall, the wainscot, and the mouse.
The death of hope and despair,
60 This is the death of air.⁶

There are flood and drouth
Over the eyes and in the mouth,
Dead water and dead sand
Contending for the upper hand.
65 The parched eviscerate soil
Gapes at the vanity of toil,
Laughs without mirth.
This is the death of earth.

Water and fire succeed
70 The town, the pasture, and the weed.
Water and fire deride
The sacrifice that we denied.
Water and fire shall rot
The marred foundations we forgot,
Of sanctuary and choir.

75 This is the death of water and fire.

 In the uncertain hour before the morning⁷
 Near the ending of interminable night
 At the recurrent end of the unending

80 After the dark dove with the flickering tongue⁸
 Had passed below the horizon of his homing
 While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin
 Over the asphalt where no other sound was
 Between three districts whence the smoke arose

85 I met one walking, loitering and hurried
 As if blown towards me like the metal leaves
 Before the urban dawn wind unresisting.
 And as I fixed upon the down-turned face
 That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge

90 The first-met stranger in the waning dusk
 I caught the sudden look of some dead master
 Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled
 Both one and many; in the brown baked features
 The eyes of a familiar compound ghost⁹

95 Both intimate and unidentifiable.
 So I assumed a double part, and cried
 And heard another's voice cry: 'What! are *you*
 here?'

 Although we were not. I was still the same,
 Knowing myself yet being someone other—

100 And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed
 To compel the recognition they preceded.
 And so, compliant to the common wind,
 Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,
 In concord at this intersection time

105 Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,
 We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.
 I said: 'The wonder that I feel is easy,
 Yet ease is cause of wonder. Therefore speak:

110 I may not comprehend, may not remember.
And he: 'I am not eager to rehearse
My thought and theory which you have forgotten.
These things have served their purpose: let them
be.
So with your own, and pray they be forgiven
By others, as I pray you to forgive
115 Both bad and good. Last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail.
For last year's words belong to last year's
language
And next year's words await another voice.
But, as the passage now presents no hindrance
120 To the spirit unappeased and peregrine^o
Between two worlds become much like each other,
So I find words I never thought to speak
In streets I never thought I should revisit
When I left my body on a distant shore.¹
125 Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled
us
To purify the dialect of the tribe²
And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,
Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
130 First, the cold friction of expiring sense
Without enchantment, offering no promise
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
Second, the conscious impotence of rage³
135 At human folly, and the laceration
Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.⁴
And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been;⁵ the shame
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
140 Of things ill done and done to others' harm

Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.
From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
145 Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire⁶
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.⁷
The day was breaking. In the disfigured street
He left me, with a kind of valediction,
And faded on the blowing of the horn.⁸

III

150 There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
Attachment to self and to things and to persons,
detachment
From self and from things and from persons; and,
growing between them, indifference
Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
Being between two lives—unflowering, between
155 The live and the dead nettle.⁹ This is the use of
memory:
For liberation—not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a
country
160 Begins as attachment to our own field of action
And comes to find that action of little importance
Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it
could, loved them,
165 To become renewed, transfigured, in another
pattern.

Sin is Behovely, but

All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well.¹
If I think, again, of this place,
And of people, not wholly commendable,
170 Of no immediate kin or kindness,
But some of peculiar genius,
All touched by a common genius,
United in the strife which divided them;
If I think of a king at nightfall,²
175 Of three men, and more, on the scaffold
And a few who died forgotten
In other places, here and abroad,
And of one who died blind and quiet³
Why should we celebrate
180 These dead men more than the dying?
It is not to ring the bell backward
Nor is it an incantation
To summon the spectre of a Rose.
We cannot revive old factions
185 We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.
These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
190 And are folded in a single party.
Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.
195 And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.⁴

IV

200 The dove⁵ descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
205 Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
210 The intolerable shirt of flame⁶
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire^o
Consumed by either fire or fire.

V

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
215 The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at
home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
And easy commerce of the old and the new,
220 The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort⁷ dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a
beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
225 Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's
throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
230 See, they return, and bring us with them.
The moment of the rose and the moment of the
yew-tree⁸
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
235 On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this
Calling⁹

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
240 Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
245 At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
250 Between two waves of the sea¹
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
255 All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

19421942, 1943

Endnotes

- Note 1:

This is the last of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, four related poems each divided into five "movements" in a manner reminiscent of the structure of a quartet or a sonata and each dealing with some aspect of the relation of time and eternity, the meaning of history, the achievement of the moment of timeless insight. Although the *Four Quartets* constitute a unified sequence, they were written separately and can be read as individual poems. "Little Gidding can be understood by itself, without reference to the preceding poems, which it yet so beautifully completes" (Helen Gardner, *The Composition of Four Quartets*). Each of the four is named after a place. Little Gidding is a village in Huntingdonshire, where, in 1625, Nicholas Ferrar established an Anglican religious community; the community was broken up in 1647, toward the end of the English Civil War, by the victorious Puritans; the chapel, however, was rebuilt in the 19th century and still exists. Eliot wrote the poem in 1942, when he was taking his turn as a nighttime fire watcher during the incendiary bombings of London in World War II.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: On the Pentecost day after the death and resurrection of Jesus, there appeared to his apostles "cloven tongues like as of fire . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: King Charles I visited Ferrar's community more than once and is said to have paid his last visit in secret after his final defeat at the Battle of Naseby in the Civil War.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "The 'sea jaws' [Eliot] associated with Iona and St. Columba and with Lindisfarne and St. Cuthbert: the 'dark lake' with the lake of Glendalough and St Kevin's hermitage in County

Wicklow: the desert with the hermits of the Thebaid and St. Antony: the city with Padua and the other St. Antony" (Gardner).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Eliot wrote to a friend: "During the Blitz [bombing] the accumulated debris was suspended in the London air for hours after a bombing. Then it would slowly descend and cover one's sleeves and coat with a fine white ash."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "The death of air," like that of "earth" and of "water and fire" in the succeeding stanzas, recalls the theory of the creative strife of the four elements propounded by Heraclitus (Greek philosopher of 4th and 5th centuries B.C.E.): "Fire lives in the death of air; water lives in the death of earth; and earth lives in the death of water."[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The pattern of indentation in the left margin of lines 78–149, their movement and elevated diction, are meant to suggest the terza rima of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The German dive bomber.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This encounter with a ghost "compounded" of W. B. Yeats and his fellow Irishman Jonathan Swift is modeled on Dante's meeting with Brunette Latini (*Inferno* 15), including a direct translation (line 98) of Dante's cry of horrified recognition: "*Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?*" See also Shakespeare's sonnet 86, line 9: "that affable familiar ghost."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Yeats died on Jan. 28, 1939, at Roquebrune in the south of France.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A rendering of the line "*Dormer un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*" in Stéphane Mallarmé's 1877 sonnet "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe" ("The Tomb of Edgar Poe").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See Yeats's "The Spur": "You think it horrible that lust and rage / Should dance attendance upon my old age."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Yeats's "Swift's Epitaph" (translated from Swift's own Latin): "Savage indignation there / Cannot lacerate his breast."[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: See Yeats's "Man and the Echo": "All that I have said and done, / Now that I am old and ill, / Turns into a question till / I lie awake night after night / And never get the answer right. / Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?"[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See *The Waste Land*, line 428 and its note; also the refining fire in Yeats's "Byzantium," lines 25–32.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See Yeats's "Among School Children," line 64: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:
See *Hamlet* 1.2.157: "It faded on the crowing of the cock." The horn is the all-clear signal after an air raid (the dialogue has taken place between the dropping of the last bomb and the sounding of the all clear). Eliot called the section that ends with this line "the nearest equivalent to a canto of the *Inferno* or *Purgatorio*" that he could achieve and spoke of his intention to present "a parallel, by means of contrast, between the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* . . . and a hallucinated scene after an air raid."
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Eliot wrote to a friend: "The dead nettle is the family of flowering plants of which the White Archangel is one of the commonest and closely resembles the stinging nettle and is found in its company."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A quotation from the 14th-century English mystic Julian of Norwich: "Sin is behovabil [inevitable and fitting], but all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, Charles I. He died "on the scaffold" in 1649, while his principal advisers, Archbishop Laud and Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, were both executed earlier by the victorious parliamentary forces.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, Milton, who sided with Cromwell against the king.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Julian of Norwich was instructed in a vision that “the ground of our beseeching” is love.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Both a dive bomber and the Holy Spirit with its Pentecostal tongues of fire.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Out of love for her husband, Hercules, Deianira gave him the poisoned shirt of Nessus. She had been told that it would increase his love for her, but instead it so corroded his flesh that in his agony he mounted a funeral pyre and burned himself to death.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Company; also harmony of sounds.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Traditional symbol of death and grief.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This line is from the *Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous 14th-century mystical work.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The voices of the children in the apple tree symbolize the sudden moment of insight. See the conclusion to “Burnt Norton” (the first of the *Four Quartets*), where the laughter of the children in the garden has a like meaning: “Sudden in a shaft of sunlight / Even while the dust moves / There rises the hidden laughter / Of children in the foliage / Quick now, here, now, always.”[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *eternal, everlasting*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *foreign, wandering*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *breathe, sigh*[Return to reference °](#)

Tradition and the Individual Talent¹

Endnotes

- Note 1: First published in *The Egoist* magazine (1919) and later collected in *The Sacred Wood* (1920). [Return to reference 1](#)

I

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. We cannot refer to 'the tradition' or to 'a tradition'; at most, we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is 'traditional' or even 'too traditional.' Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archæology.

Certainly the word is not likely to appear in our appreciations of living or dead writers. Every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind; and is even more oblivious of the shortcomings and limitations of its critical habits than of those of its creative genius. We know, or think we know, from the enormous mass of critical writing that has appeared in the French language the critical method or habit of the French; we only conclude (we are such unconscious people) that the French are 'more critical' than we, and sometimes even plume ourselves a little with the fact, as if the French were the less spontaneous. Perhaps they are; but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism. One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most

individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity.

Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, 'tradition' should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the

new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past. I say judged, not amputated, by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics. It is a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other. To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other.

To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the poet to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus,² nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, and the third is a pleasant and highly desirable supplement. The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much

more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian³ draftsmen. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which we imagine; perhaps only in the end based upon a complication in economics and machinery. But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

Someone said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did.' Precisely, and they are that which we know.

I am alive to a usual objection to what is clearly part of my programme for the *métier*⁴ poetry. The objection is that the doctrine requires a ridiculous amount of erudition (pedantry), a claim which can be rejected by appeal to the lives of poets in any pantheon. It will even be affirmed that much learning deadens or perverts poetic sensibility. While, however, we persist in believing that a poet ought to know as much as will not encroach upon his necessary receptivity and necessary laziness, it is not desirable to confine knowledge to whatever can be put into a useful shape for examinations, drawing-rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch⁵ than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

There remains to define this process of depersonalisation and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I, therefore, invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated⁶ platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.

Endnotes

- Note 2: A round mass of anything: a large pill.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The most advanced culture of the European Paleolithic period (from discoveries at La Madeleine, France).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Vocation (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Greek biographer (1st century C.E.) of famous Greeks and Romans; from his work Shakespeare drew the plots of his Roman plays.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Drawn out like a thread.[Return to reference 6](#)

II

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry. If we attend to the confused cries of the newspaper critics and the susurrus⁷ of popular repetition that follows, we shall hear the names of poets in great numbers; if we seek not Blue-book⁸ knowledge but the enjoyment of poetry, and ask for a poem, we shall seldom find it. I have tried to point out the importance of the relation of the poem to other poems by other authors, and suggested the conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written. The other aspect of this Impersonal theory of poetry is the relation of the poem to its author. And I hinted, by an analogy, that the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of 'personality,' not being necessarily more interesting, or having 'more to say,' but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations.

The analogy was that of the catalyst.⁹ When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.

The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two lands: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular

words or phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result. Or great poetry may be made without the direct use of any emotion whatever composed out of feelings solely. Canto XV of the *Inferno* (Brunetto Latini)¹ is a working up of the emotion evident in the situation; but the effect, though single as that of any work of art, is obtained by considerable complexity of detail. The last quatrain gives an image, a feeling attaching to an image, which 'came,' which did not develop simply out of what precedes, but which was probably in suspension in the poet's mind until the proper combination arrived for it to add itself to.² The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.

If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of 'sublimity' misses the mark. For it is not the 'greatness,' the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts. The episode of Paolo and Francesca³ employs a definite emotion, but the intensity of the poetry is something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of. It is no more intense, furthermore, than Canto XXVI,⁴ the voyage of Ulysses, which has not the direct dependence upon an emotion. Great variety is possible in the process of transmutation of emotion: the murder of Agamemnon, or the agony of Othello,⁵ gives an artistic effect apparently closer to a possible original than the scenes from Dante. In the *Agamemnon*, the artistic emotion approximates to the emotion of an actual spectator; in *Othello* to the emotion of the protagonist himself. But the difference between art and the event is always absolute; the combination which is the murder of Agamemnon is probably as complex as that which is the voyage of Ulysses. In either case there has been a fusion of elements. The ode of Keats contains a number of feelings which have nothing particular to do with the nightingale, but which the

nightingale, partly, perhaps, because of its attractive name, and partly because of its reputation, served to bring together.

The point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul: for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality.

I will quote a passage which is unfamiliar enough to be regarded with fresh attention in the light—or darkness—of these observations:

And now methinks I could e'en chide myself
For doating on her beauty, though her death
Shall be revenged after no common action.
Does the silkworm expend her yellow labours
For thee? For thee does she undo herself?
Are lordships solid to maintain ladyships
For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?
Why does yon fellow falsify highways,
And put his life between the judge's lips,
To refine such a thing—keeps horse and men
To beat their valours for her? . . . [6](#)

In this passage (as is evident if it is taken in its context) there is a combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it. This balance of contrasted emotion is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent, but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak, the structural emotion, provided by the drama. But the whole effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no

means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion.

It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. One error, in fact, of eccentricity in poetry is to seek for new human emotions to express; and in this search for novelty in the wrong place it discovers the perverse. The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. And emotions which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. Consequently, we must believe that 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'² is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquility. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all; it is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. These experiences are not 'recollected,' and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event. Of course this is not quite the whole story. There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him 'personal.' Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

Endnotes

- Note 7: Murmuring, buzzing (Latin).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: British government publication.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Substance that triggers a chemical change without being affected by the reaction.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In hell Dante meets his old master, Brunetto Latini, suffering eternal punishment for unnatural lust yet still loved and admired by Dante, who addresses him with affectionate courtesy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Dante's strange interview with Brunetto is over, and Brunetto moves off to continue his punishment: "Then he turned round, and seemed like one of those / Who run for the green cloth [in the footrace] at Verona / In the field; and he seemed among them / Not the loser but the winner."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Illicit lovers whom Dante meets in the second circle of hell (*Inferno* 5) and at whose punishment and sorrows he swoons with pity.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Of the *Inferno*. Ulysses, suffering in hell for "false counseling," tells Dante of his final voyage.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Shakespeare's character kills himself after being duped into jealously murdering his wife. In Aeschylus's play *Agamemnon*, the title character is murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From Cyril Tournier's *Revenger's Tragedy* 3.4 (1607).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (2nd ed., 1800), Wordsworth writes that poetry "takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."[Return to reference 7](#)

III

ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἴσως θεϊότερόν τι καὶ ἀπαθεῖσ' ἐστίν.^{[8](#)}

This essay proposes to halt at the frontier of metaphysics or mysticism, and confine itself to such practical conclusions as can be applied by the responsible person interested in poetry. To divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad. There are many people who appreciate the expression of sincere emotion in verse, and there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is an expression of *significant* emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

1919, 1920

Endnotes

- Note 8: Aristotle's "De Anima" ("On the Soul") 1.4: "The mind is doubtless something more divine and unimpressionable." [Return to reference 8](#)

The Metaphysical Poets

By collecting these poems¹ from the work of a generation more often named than read, and more often read than profitably studied, Professor Grierson has rendered a service of some importance. Certainly the reader will meet with many poems already preserved in other anthologies, at the same time that he discovers poems such as those of Aurelian Townshend or Lord Herbert of Cherbury here included. But the function of such an anthology as this is neither that of Professor Saintsbury's admirable edition of Caroline poets nor that of the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. Mr. Grierson's book is in itself a piece of criticism and a provocation of criticism; and we think that he was right in including so many poems of Donne, elsewhere (though not in many editions) accessible, as documents in the case of 'metaphysical poetry.' The phrase has long done duty as a term of abuse or as the label of a quaint and pleasant taste. The question is to what extent the so-called metaphysicals formed a school (in our own time we should say a 'movement'), and how far this so-called school or movement is a digression from the main current.

Not only is it extremely difficult to define metaphysical poetry, but difficult to decide what poets practise it and in which of their verses. The poetry of Donne (to whom Marvell and Bishop King are sometimes nearer than any of the other authors) is late Elizabethan, its feeling often very close to that of Chapman. The 'courtly' poetry is derivative from Jonson, who borrowed liberally from the Latin; it expires in the next century with the sentiment and witticism of Prior. There is finally the devotional verse of Herbert, Vaughan, and Crashaw (echoed long after by Christina Rossetti and Francis Thompson); Crashaw, sometimes more profound and less sectarian than the others, has a quality which returns through the Elizabethan period to the early Italians. It is difficult to find any precise use of metaphor, simile, or other conceit, which is common to all the poets and at the same time important enough as an element of style to

isolate these poets as a group. Donne, and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically 'metaphysical'; the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it. Thus Cowley develops the commonplace comparison of the world to a chess-board through long stanzas (*To Destiny*), and Donne, with more grace, in *A Valediction*,² the comparison of two lovers to a pair of compasses. But elsewhere we find, instead of the mere explication of the content of a comparison, a development by rapid association of thought which requires considerable agility on the part of the reader.

On a round ball
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved
*so.*³

Here we find at least two connexions which are not implicit in the first figure, but are forced upon it by the poet: from the geographer's globe to the tear, and the tear to the deluge. On the other hand, some of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts:

*A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,*⁴

where the most powerful effect is produced by the sudden contrast of associations of 'bright hair' and of 'bone'. This telescoping of images and multiplied associations is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period which Donne knew: not to

mention Shakespeare, it is frequent in Middleton, Webster, and Tourneur, and is one of the sources of the vitality of their language.

Johnson, who employed the term 'metaphysical poets', apparently having Donne, Cleveland, and Cowley chiefly in mind, remarks of them that 'the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together'⁵ The force of this impeachment lies in the failure of the conjunction, the fact that often the ideas are yoked but not united; and if we are to judge of styles of poetry by their abuse, enough examples, may be found in Cleveland to justify Johnson's condemnation. But a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry. We need not select for illustration such a line as:

*Notre âme est un trois-mâts cherchant son Icarie;*⁶

we may find it in some of the best lines of Johnson himself (*The Vanity of Human Wishes*):

*His fate was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;
He left a name at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.*

where the effect is due to a contrast of ideas, different in degree but the same in principle, as that which Johnson mildly reprehended. And in one of the finest poems of the age (a poem which could not have been written in any other age), the *Exequy* of Bishop King, the extended comparison is used with perfect success: the idea and the simile become one, in the passage in which the Bishop illustrates his impatience to see his dead wife, under the figure of a journey:

*Stay for me there; I will not faile
To meet thee in that hollow Vale.
And think not much of my delay;
I am already on the way,
And follow thee with all the speed*

*Desire can make, or sorrows breed.
Each minute is a short degree,
And ev'ry hour a step towards thee,
At night when I betake to rest,
Next morn I rise nearer my West
Of life, almost by eight houres sail,
Than when sleep breath'd his drowsy gale. . . .
But heark! My Pulse, like a soft Drum
Beats my approach, tells Thee I come;
And slow howere my marches be,
I shall at last sit down by Thee.*

(In the last few lines there is that effect of terror which is several times attained by one of Bishop King's admirers, Edgar Poe.) Again, we may justly take these quatrains from Lord Herbert's Ode,⁷ stanzas which would, we think, be immediately pronounced to be of the metaphysical school:

*So when from hence we shall be gone,
And be no more, nor you, nor I,
As one another's mystery,
Each shall be both, yet both but one.*

*This said, in her up-lifted face,
Her eyes, which did that beauty crown,
Were like two stars, that having faln down,
Look up again to find their place:*

*While such a moveless silent peace
Did seize on their becalmed sense,
One would have thought some influence
Their ravished spirits did possess.*

There is nothing in these lines (with the possible exception of the stars, a simile not at once grasped, but lovely and justified) which fits Johnson's general observations on the metaphysical poets in his

essay on Cowley. A good deal resides in the richness of association which is at the same time borrowed from and given to the word 'becalmed'; but the meaning is clear, the language simple and elegant. It is to be observed that the language of these poets is as a rule simple and pure; in the verse of George Herbert this simplicity is carried as far as it can go—a simplicity emulated without success by numerous modern poets. The *structure* of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple, but this is not a vice; it is a fidelity to thought and feeling. The effect, at its best, is far less artificial than that of an ode by Gray. And as this fidelity induces variety of thought and feeling, so it induces variety of music. We doubt whether, in the eighteenth century, could be found two poems in nominally the same metre, so dissimilar as Marvell's *Coy Mistress* and Crashaw's *Saint Teresa*; the one producing an effect of great speed by the use of short syllables, and the other an ecclesiastical solemnity by the use of long ones:

*Love, thou art absolute sole lord
Of life and death.*

If so shrewd and sensitive (though so limited) a critic as Johnson failed to define metaphysical poetry by its faults, it is worth while to inquire whether we may not have more success by adopting the opposite method: by assuming that the poets of the seventeenth century (up to the Revolution)⁸ were the direct and normal development of the precedent age; and, without prejudicing their case by the adjective 'metaphysical', consider whether their virtue was not something permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared, but ought not to have disappeared. Johnson has hit, perhaps by accident, on one of their peculiarities, when he observes that 'their attempts were always analytic'; he would not agree that, after the dissociation, they put the material together again in a new unity.

It is certain that the dramatic verse of the later Elizabethan and early Jacobean poets expresses a degree, of development of

sensibility which is not found in any of the prose, good as it often is. If we except Marlowe, a man of prodigious intelligence, these dramatists were directly or indirectly (it is at least a tenable theory) affected by Montaigne.⁹ Even if we except also Jonson and Chapman, these two were probably erudite, and were notably men who incorporated their erudition into their sensibility: their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought. In Chapman especially there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what we find in Donne:

*in this one thing, all the discipline
Of manners and of manhood is contained;
A man to join himself with th' Universe
In his main sway, and make in all things fit
One with that All, and go on, round as it;
Not plucking from the whole his wretched part,
And into straits, or into nought revert,
Wishing the complete Universe might be
Subject to such a rag of it as he;
But to consider great Necessity.¹*

We compare this with some modern passage:

*No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
He's left, himself, i' the middle; the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!²*

It is perhaps somewhat less fair, though very tempting (as both poets are concerned with the perpetuation of love by offspring), to compare with the stanzas already quoted from Lord Herbert's Ode the following from Tennyson:

One walked between his wife and child,

*With measured footfall firm and mild,
And now and then he gravely smiled.
The prudent partner of his blood
Leaned on him, faithful, gentle, good,
Wearing the rose of womanhood.
And in their double love secure,
The little maiden walked demure,
Pacing with downward eyelids pure.
These three made unity so sweet,
My frozen heart began to beat,
Remembering its ancient heat.³*

The difference is not a simple difference of degree between poets. It is something which had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza,⁴ and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

We may express the difference by the following theory: The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were; no less nor more than Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Guinicelli, or Cino.⁵ In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and

Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. The language went on and in some respects improved; the best verse of Collins, Gray, Johnson, and even Goldsmith satisfies some of our fastidious demands better than that of Donne or Marvell or King. But while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude. The feeling, the sensibility, expressed in the *Country Churchyard*⁶ (to say nothing of Tennyson and Browning) is cruder than that in the *Coy Mistress*.

The second effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden followed from the first, and was therefore slow in manifestation. The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, in the second *Hyperion*, there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated.

After this brief exposition of a theory—too brief, perhaps, to carry conviction—we may ask, what would have been the fate of the 'metaphysical' had the current of poetry descended in a direct line from them, as it descended in a direct line to them? They would not, certainly, be classified as metaphysical. The possible interests of a poet are unlimited; the more intelligent he is the better; the more intelligent he is the more likely that he will have interests: our only condition is that he turn them into poetry, and not merely meditate on them poetically. A philosophical theory which has entered into poetry is established, for its truth or falsity in one sense ceases to matter, and its truth in another sense is proved. The poets in question have, like other poets, various faults. But they were, at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling. And this means both that they are more mature, and that they wear better, than later poets of certainly not less literary ability.

It is not a permanent necessity that poets should be interested in philosophy, or in any other subject. We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (A brilliant and extreme statement of this view, with which it is not requisite to associate oneself, is that of M Jean Epstein, *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui*.⁷ Hence we get something which looks very much like the conceit—we get, in fact, a method curiously similar to that of the 'metaphysical poets', similar also in its use of obscure words and of simple phrasing.

*O géraniums diaphanes, guerroyeurs sortilèges,
Sacrilèges monomanes!
Emballages, dévergondages, douches! O pressoirs
Des vendanges des grands soirs!
Layettes aux abois,
Thyrses au fond des bois!
Transfusions, représailles,
Relevailles, compresses et l'éternel potion,
Angélus! n'en pouvoir plus
De débâcles nuptiales! de débâcles nuptiales!*⁸

The same poet could write also simply:

*Elle est bien loin, elle pleure,
Le grand vent se lamente aussi . . .*⁹

Jules Laforgue, and Tristan Corbière¹ in many of his poems, are nearer to the 'school of Donne' than any modern English poet. But poets more classical than they have the same essential quality of transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind.

*Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah, que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!*²

In French literature the great master of the seventeenth century—Racine—and the great master of the nineteenth—Baudelaire—are in some ways more like each other than they are like anyone else. The greatest two masters of diction are also the greatest two psychologists, the most curious explorers of the soul. It is interesting to speculate whether it is not a misfortune that two of the greatest masters of diction in our language, Milton and Dryden, triumph with a dazzling disregard of the soul. If we continued to produce Miltons and Drydens it might not so much matter, but as things are it is a pity that English poetry has remained so incomplete. Those who object to the 'artificiality' of Milton or Dryden sometimes tell us to 'look into our hearts and write.'³ But that is not looking deep enough; Racine or Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts.

May we not conclude, then, that Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert and Lord Herbert, Marvell, King, Cowley at his best, are in the direct current of English poetry, and that their faults should be reprimanded by this standard rather than coddled by antiquarian affection? They have been enough praised in terms which are implicit limitations because they are 'metaphysical' or 'witty,' 'quaint' or 'obscure,' though at their best they have not these attributes more than other serious poets. On the other hand, we must not reject the criticism of Johnson (a dangerous person to disagree with) without having mastered it, without having assimilated the Johnsonian canons of taste. In reading the celebrated passage in his essay on Cowley we must remember that by wit he clearly means something more serious than we usually mean to-day; in his criticism of their versification we must remember in what a narrow discipline he was trained, but also how well trained; we must remember that Johnson

tortures chiefly the chief offenders, Cowley and Cleveland. It would be a fruitful work, and one requiring a substantial book, to break up the classification of Johnson (for there has been none since) and exhibit these poets in all their difference of kind and of degree, from the massive music of Donne to the faint, pleasing tinkle of Aurelian Townshend—whose *Dialogue between a Pilgrim and Time* is one of the few regrettable omissions from the excellent anthology of Professor Grierson.

1921

Endnotes

- Note 1: *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler* (1921), selected and edited, with an essay, by Herbert J. C. Grierson. Eliot's essay was originally a review of this book in the London *Times Literary Supplement*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Donne's "A Valediction: Of Weeping," lines 10–18.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: "The Relic," line 6.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: See Samuel Johnson's *Cowley*.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From Charles Baudelaire's "Le Voyage": "Our soul is a three-masted ship searching for her Icarie"; "Icarie": an imaginary utopia in *Voyage en Icarie* (1840), a novel by the French socialist Etienne Cabet.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), brother of George Herbert. The "Ode" is his "Ode upon a Question moved, whether Love should continue forever?"[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Of 1688; when James II was replaced by William and Mary.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), French essayist.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: From *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (4.1.137–46).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Robert Browning, "Bishop Blougram's Apology," lines 693–97.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "The Two Voices," lines 412–23.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: These last three poets, all of whom lived in the 13th century, were members of the Tuscan school of lyric love poets. Guido Guinicelli was hailed by Dante in the *Purgatorio* as "father of Italian poets." Cino da Pistoia was a friend of Dante and Petrarch.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, "An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," by Thomas Gray (1716–1771).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Poetry of today (French).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:
From *Derniers Vers* (*Last Poems*, 1890) 10, by Jules Laforgue (1860–1887): "O transparent geraniums, warrior incantations, / Monomaniac sacrileges! / Packing materials, shamelessnesses, shower baths! O wine presses / Of great evening vintages! / Hard-pressed baby linen, / Thyrsis in the depths of the woods! / Transfusions, reprisals, / Churchings, compresses, and the eternal potion, / Angelus! no longer to be borne [are] / Catastrophic marriages! catastrophic marriages!"
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From *Derniers Vers* 11, "Sur une Défunte" ("On a Dead Woman"): "She is far away, she weeps / The great wind mourns also."[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: French symbolist poet (1845–1875).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From Charles Baudelaire's "Le Voyage": "For the child, in love with maps and prints, / The universe matches his vast appetite. / Ah, how big the world is by lamplight! How small the world is to the eyes of memory!"[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An adaptation of the last line of the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, by Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586).[Return to](#)

[reference 3](#)

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

1888–1923

Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp was born in Wellington, New Zealand, daughter of a respected businessman who was later knighted. In 1903 the family moved to London, where Kathleen and her sisters entered Queen's College, the first institution in England founded expressly for the higher education of women. The family returned to New Zealand, leaving the girls in London, but the Beauchamps brought their daughters home in 1906. By this time Kathleen had written a number of poems, sketches, and stories; and after experimenting with different pen names, she adopted that of Katherine Mansfield. She was restless and ambitious and chafed against the narrowness of middle-class life in New Zealand, at that time still very much a new country in the shadow of the British Empire.

In July 1908 Mansfield left again for London; she never returned to New Zealand. In 1909 she suddenly married G. C. Bowden, a teacher of singing and elocution, but left him the same evening. Shortly afterward she became pregnant by another man and went to Germany to await the birth, but she had a miscarriage there. Her experiences in Germany are told in carefully observed sketches full of ironic detail in her first published book, *In a German Pension* (1911).

In 1910 she briefly resumed life with Bowden, who put her in touch with A. R. Orage, editor of the avant-garde periodical *The New*

Age. There she published a number of her stories and sketches. At the end of 1911 she met the critic John Middleton Murry, editor of the modernist magazine *Rhythm*, and eventually married him. She developed intense but conflicted friendships with D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and other writers of the day. During all this time Mansfield experimented in technique and refined her art, attempting within the short story to illuminate the ambivalences and complexities of friendship and family, gender and class. The death in World War I, in October 1915, of her much-loved younger brother sent her imagination back to their childhood days in New Zealand and in doing so gave a fresh charge and significance to her writing. Using her newly developed style with an ever greater subtlety and sensitivity, she now produced her best stories, including "Prelude," "Daughters of the Late Colonel," "At the Bay," and "The Garden Party." With the publication of *The Garden Party and Other Stories* in February 1922, Mansfield's place as a master of the modern short story was ensured. But she was gravely ill with tuberculosis and died suddenly at the age of thirty-four in Fontainebleau, France, where she had gone to try to find a cure by adopting the methods of the controversial mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff.

Mansfield produced her best and most characteristic work in her last years, when she combined incident, image, symbol, and structure in a way comparable with, yet interestingly different from, James Joyce's method in *Dubliners*, the two writers sharing an influence in the precise and understated art of the Russian writer Anton Chekhov. "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," a story of two middle-aged sisters and their devotion to a tyrannical father, shows her working characteristically through suggestion rather than explicit development to illuminate a late-Victorian world, with the subdued elegiac sense of female lives wasted in the service of an outmoded patriarchal order, although the story's ironic surface is restrained comedy. The meaning is achieved most of all through the atmosphere, built up by the accumulation of small strokes, none of which seems more than a shrewdly observed realistic detail. Mansfield also manipulates time masterfully: she makes particularly

effective use of the unobtrusive flashback, where we find ourselves in an earlier phase of the action without quite knowing how we got there but fully aware of its relevance to the total action and atmosphere.

The Daughters of the Late Colonel

I

The week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives. Even when they went to bed it was only their bodies that lay down and rested; their minds went on, thinking things out, talking things over, wondering, deciding, trying to remember where . . .

Constantia lay like a statue, her hands by her sides, her feet just overlapping each other, the sheet up to her chin. She stared at the ceiling.

'Do you think father would mind if we gave his top-hat to the porter?'

'The porter?' snapped Josephine. 'Why ever the porter? What a very extraordinary idea!'

'Because,' said Constantia slowly, 'he must often have to go to funerals. And I noticed at—at the cemetery that he only had a bowler.' She paused. 'I thought then how very much he'd appreciate a top-hat. We ought to give him a present, too. He was always very nice to father.'

'But,' cried Josephine, flouncing on her pillow and staring across the dark at Constantia, 'father's head!' And suddenly, for one awful moment, she nearly giggled. Not, of course, that she felt in the least like giggling. It must have been habit. Years ago, when they had stayed awake at night talking, their beds had simply heaved. And now the porter's head, disappearing, popped out, like a candle, under father's hat. . . . The giggle mounted, mounted; she clenched her hands; she fought it down; she frowned fiercely at the dark and said 'Remember' terribly sternly.

'We can decide tomorrow,' she sighed.

Constantia had noticed nothing; she sighed.

'Do you think we ought to have our dressing-gowns dyed as well?'

'Black?' almost shrieked Josephine.

'Well, what else?' said Constantia. 'I was thinking—it doesn't seem quite sincere, in a way, to wear black out of doors and when we're fully dressed, and then when we're at home—'

'But nobody sees us,' said Josephine. She gave the bedclothes such a twitch that both her feet became uncovered and she had to creep up the pillows to get them well under again.

'Kate does,' said Constantia. 'And the postman very well might.'

Josephine thought of her dark-red slippers, which matched her dressing-gown, and of Constantia's favourite indefinite green ones which went with hers. Black! Two black dressing-gowns and two pairs of black woolly slippers, creeping off to the bathroom like black cats.

'I don't think it's absolutely necessary,' said she.

Silence. Then Constantia said, 'We shall have to post the papers with the notice in them tomorrow to catch the Ceylon mail. . . . How many letters have we had up till now?'

'Twenty-three.'

Josephine had replied to them all, and twenty-three times when she came to 'We miss our dear father so much' she had broken down and had to use her handkerchief, and on some of them even to soak up a very light-blue tear with an edge of blotting-paper. Strange! She couldn't have put it on—but twenty-three times. Even now, though, when she said over to herself sadly 'We miss our dear father so much,' she could have cried if she'd wanted to.

'Have you got enough stamps?' came from Constantia.

'Oh, how can I tell?' said Josephine crossly. 'What's the good of asking me that now?'

'I was just wondering,' said Constantia mildly.

Silence again. There came a little rustle, a scurry, a hop.

'A mouse,' said Constantia.

'It can't be a mouse because there aren't any crumbs,' said Josephine.

'But it doesn't know there aren't,' said Constantia.

A spasm of pity squeezed her heart. Poor little thing! She wished she'd left a tiny piece of biscuit on the dressing-table. It was awful to think of it not finding anything. What would it do?

'I can't think how they manage to live at all,' she said slowly.

'Who?' demanded Josephine.

And Constantia said more loudly than she meant to, 'Mice.'

Josephine was furious. 'Oh, what nonsense, Con!' she said. 'What have mice got to do with it? You're asleep.'

'I don't think I am,' said Constantia. She shut her eyes to make sure. She was.

Josephine arched her spine, pulled up her knees, folded her arms so that her fists came under her ears, and pressed her cheek hard against the pillow.

II

Another thing which complicated matters was they had Nurse Andrews staying on with them that week. It was their own fault; they had asked her. It was Josephine's idea. On the morning—well, on the last morning, when the doctor had gone, Josephine had said to Constantia, 'Don't you think it would be rather nice if we asked Nurse Andrews to stay on for a week as our guest?'

'Very nice,' said Constantia.

'I thought,' went on Josephine quickly, 'I should just say this afternoon, after I've paid her, 'My sister and I would be very pleased, after all you've done for us, Nurse Andrews, if you would stay on for a week as our guest.' I'd have to put that in about being our guest in case—'

'Oh, but she could hardly expect to be paid!' cried Constantia.

'One never knows,' said Josephine sagely.

Nurse Andrews had, of course, jumped at the idea. But it was a bother. It meant they had to have regular sit-down meals at the

proper times, whereas if they'd been alone they could just have asked Kate if she wouldn't have minded bringing them a tray wherever they were. And meal-times now that the strain was over were rather a trial.

Nurse Andrews was simply fearful about butter. Really they couldn't help feeling that about butter, at least, she took advantage of their kindness. And she had that maddening habit of asking for just an inch more bread to finish what she had on her plate, and then, at the last mouthful, absent-mindedly—of course it wasn't absent-mindedly—taking another helping. Josephine got very red when this happened, and she fastened her small, bead-like eyes on the tablecloth as if she saw a minute strange insect creeping through the web of it. But Constantia's long, pale face lengthened and set, and she gazed away—away—far over the desert, to where that line of camels unwound like a thread of wool. . . .

'When I was with Lady Tukes,' said Nurse Andrews, 'she had such a dainty little contrayvance for the buttah. It was a silvah cupid balanced on the—on the bordah of a glass dish, holding a tayny fork. And when you wanted some buttah you simply pressed his foot and he bent down and speared you a piece. It was quite a gayme.'

Josephine could hardly bear that. But 'I think those things are very extravagant' was all she said.

'But whey?' asked Nurse Andrews, beaming through her eyeglasses. 'No one, surely, would take more buttah than one wanted—would one?'

'Ring, Con,' cried Josephine. She couldn't trust herself to reply.

And proud young Kate, the enchanted princess, came in to see what the old tabbies wanted now. She snatched away their plates of mock something or other and slapped down a white terrified blancmange.¹

'Jam, please, Kate,' said Josephine kindly.

Kate knelt and burst open the sideboard, lifted the lid of the jam-pot, saw it was empty, put it on the table, and stalked off.

'I'm afraid,' said Nurse Andrews a moment later, 'there isn't any.'

'Oh, what a bother!' said Josephine. She bit her lip. 'What had we better do?'

Constantia looked dubious. 'We can't disturb Kate again,' she said softly.

Nurse Andrews waited, smiling at them both. Her eyes wandered, spying at everything behind her eyeglasses. Constantia in despair went back to her camels. Josephine frowned heavily—concentrated. If it hadn't been for this idiotic woman she and Con would, of course, have eaten their blancmange without. Suddenly the idea came.

'I know,' she said. 'Marmalade. There's some marmalade in the sideboard. Get it, Con.'

'I hope,' laughed Nurse Andrews—and her laugh was like a spoon tinkling against a medicine glass—'I hope it's not very bittah marmalayde.'

III

But, after all, it was not long now, and then she'd be gone for good. And there was no getting over the fact that she had been very kind to father. She had nursed him day and night at the end. Indeed, both Constantia and Josephine felt privately she had rather overdone the not leaving him at the very last. For when they had gone in to say goodbye Nurse Andrews had sat beside his bed the whole time, holding his wrist and pretending to look at her watch. It couldn't have been necessary. It was so tactless, too. Supposing father had wanted to say something—something private to them. Not that he had. Oh, far from it! He lay there, purple, a dark, angry purple in the face, and never even looked at them when they came in. Then, as they were standing there, wondering what to do, he had suddenly opened one eye. Oh, what a difference it would have made, what a difference to their memory of him, how much easier to tell people about it, if he had only opened both! But no—one eye only. It glared at them a moment and then . . . went out.

IV

It had made it very awkward for them when Mr Farolles, of St John's, called the same afternoon.

'The end was quite peaceful, I trust?' were the first words he said as he glided towards them through the dark drawing-room.

'Quite,' said Josephine faintly. They both hung their heads. Both of them felt certain that eye wasn't at all a peaceful eye.

'Won't you sit down?' said Josephine.

'Thank you, Miss Pinner,' said Mr Farolles gratefully. He folded his coattails and began to lower himself into father's armchair, but just as he touched it he almost sprang up and slid into the next chair instead.

He coughed. Josephine clasped her hands; Constantia looked vague.

'I want you to feel, Miss Pinner,' said Mr Farolles, 'and you, Miss Constantia, that I'm trying to be helpful. I want to be helpful to you both, if you will let me. These are the times,' said Mr Farolles, very simply and earnestly, 'when God means us to be helpful to one another.'

'Thank you very much, Mr Farolles,' said Josephine and Constantia.

'Not at all,' said Mr Farolles gently. He drew his kid gloves through his fingers and leaned forward. 'And if either of you would like a little Communion, either or both of you, here and now, you have only to tell me. A little Communion is often very help—a great comfort,' he added tenderly.

But the idea of a little Communion terrified them. What! In the drawing room by themselves—with no—no altar or anything! The piano would be much too high, thought Constantia, and Mr Farolles could not possibly lean over it with the chalice. And Kate would be sure to come bursting in and interrupt them, thought Josephine. And supposing the bell rang in the middle? It might be somebody important—about their mourning. Would they get up reverently and go out, or would they have to wait . . . in torture?

'Perhaps you will send round a note by your good Kate if you would care for it later,' said Mr Farolles.

'Oh yes, thank you very much!' they both said.

Mr Farolles got up and took his black straw hat from the round table.

'And about the funeral,' he said softly. 'I may arrange that—as your dear father's old friend and yours, Miss Pinner—and Miss Constantia?'

Josephine and Constantia got up too.

'I should like it to be quite simple,' said Josephine firmly, 'and not too expensive. At the same time, I should like—'

'A good one that will last,' thought dreamy Constantia, as if Josephine were buying a nightgown. But of course Josephine didn't say that. 'One suitable to our father's position.' She was very nervous.

'I'll run round to our good friend Mr Knight,' said Mr Farolles soothingly. 'I will ask him to come and see you. I am sure you will find him very helpful indeed.'

V

Well, at any rate, all that part of it was over, though neither of them could possibly believe that father was never coming back. Josephine had had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without asking his permission. What would father say when he found out? For he was bound to find out sooner or later. He always did. 'Buried. You two girls had me buried?' She heard his stick thumping. Oh, what would they say? What possible excuse could they make? It sounded such an appallingly heartless thing to do. Such a wicked advantage to take of a person because he happened to be helpless at the moment. The other people seemed to treat it all as a matter of course. They were strangers; they couldn't be expected to understand that father was the very last person for such a thing to happen to. No, the entire blame for it all would fall on her and Constantia. And the expense, she thought, stepping into the tight-buttoned cab. When she had to show him the bills. What would he say then?

She heard him absolutely roaring, 'And do you expect me to pay for this gimcrack excursion of yours?'

'Oh,' groaned poor Josephine aloud, 'we shouldn't have done it, Con!'

And Constantia, pale as a lemon in all that blackness, said in a frightened whisper, 'Done what, Jug?'

'Let them bu-bury father like that,' said Josephine, breaking down and crying into her new, queer-smelling mourning handkerchief.

'But what else could we have done?' asked Constantia wonderingly. 'We couldn't have kept him unburied. At any rate, not in a flat that size.'

Josephine blew her nose; the cab was dreadfully stuffy.

'I don't know,' she said forlornly. 'It is all so dreadful. I feel we ought to have tried to, just for a time at least. To make perfectly sure. One thing's certain'—and her tears sprang out again—'father will never forgive us for this—never!'

VI

Father would never forgive them. That was what they felt more than ever when, two mornings later, they went into his room to go through his things. They had discussed it quite calmly. It was even down on Josephine's list of things to be done. Go through father's things and settle about them. But that was a very different matter from saying after breakfast:

'Well, are you ready, Con?'

'Yes, Jug—when you are.'

'Then I think we'd better get it over.'

It was dark in the hall. It had been a rule for years never to disturb father in the morning, whatever happened. And now they were going to open the door without knocking even. . . .

Constantia's eyes were enormous at the idea; Josephine felt weak in the knees.

'You—you go first,' she gasped, pushing Constantia.

But Constantia said, as she always had said on those occasions, 'No, Jug, that's not fair. You're the eldest.'

Josephine was just going to say—what at other times she wouldn't have owned to for the world—what she kept for her very last weapon, 'But you're the tallest,' when they noticed that the kitchen door was open, and there stood Kate. . . .

'Very stiff,' said Josephine, grasping the door-handle and doing her best to turn it. As if anything ever deceived Kate!

It couldn't be helped. That girl was . . . Then the door was shut behind them, but—but they weren't in father's room at all. They might have suddenly walked through the wall by mistake into a different flat altogether. Was the door just behind them? They were too frightened to look. Josephine knew that if it was it was holding itself tight shut; Constantia felt that, like the doors in dreams, it hadn't any handle at all. It was the coldness which made it so awful. Or the whiteness—which? Everything was covered. The blinds were down, a cloth hung over the mirror, a sheet hid the bed, a huge fan of white paper filled the fireplace. Constantia timidly put out her hand; she almost expected a snowflake to fall. Josephine felt a queer tingling in her nose, as if her nose was freezing. Then a cab klop-klopped over the cobbles below, and the quiet seemed to shake into little pieces.

'I had better pull up a blind,' said Josephine bravely.

'Yes, it might be a good idea,' whispered Constantia.

They only gave the blind a touch, but it flew up and the cord flew after, rolling round the blind-stick, and the little tassel tapped as if trying to get free. That was too much for Constantia.

'Don't you think—don't you think we might put it off for another day?' she whispered.

'Why?' snapped Josephine, feeling, as usual, much better now that she knew for certain that Constantia was terrified. 'It's got to be done. But I do wish you wouldn't whisper, Con.'

'I didn't know I was whispering,' whispered Constantia.

'And why do you keep on staring at the bed?' said Josephine, raising her voice almost defiantly. 'There's nothing on the bed.'

'Oh, Jug, don't say so!' said poor Connie. 'At any rate, not so loudly.'

Josephine felt herself that she had gone too far. She took a wide swerve over to the chest of drawers, put out her hand, but quickly drew it back again.

'Connie!' she gasped, and she wheeled round and leaned with her back against the chest of drawers.

'Oh, Jug—what?'

Josephine could only glare. She had the most extraordinary feeling that she had just escaped something simply awful. But how could she explain to Constantia that father was in the chest of drawers? He was in the top drawer with his handkerchiefs and neckties, or in the next with his shirts and pyjamas, or in the lowest of all with his suits. He was watching there, hidden away—just behind the door-handle—ready to spring.

She pulled a funny old-fashioned face at Constantia, just as she used to in the old days when she was going to cry.

'I can't open,' she nearly wailed.

'No, don't, Jug,' whispered Constantia earnestly. 'It's much better not to. Don't let's open anything. At any rate, not for a long time.'

'But—but it seems so weak,' said Josephine, breaking down.

'But why not be weak for once, Jug?' argued Constantia, whispering quite fiercely. 'If it is weak.' And her pale stare flew from the locked writing-table—so safe—to the huge glittering wardrobe, and she began to breathe in a queer, panting way. 'Why shouldn't we be weak for once in our lives, Jug? It's quite excusable. Let's be weak—be weak, Jug. It's much nicer to be weak than to be strong.'

And then she did one of those amazingly bold things that she'd done about twice before in their lives: she marched over to the wardrobe, turned the key, and took it out of the lock. Took it out of the lock and held it up to Josephine, showing Josephine by her extraordinary smile that she knew what she'd done—she'd risked deliberately father being in there among his overcoats.

If the huge wardrobe had lurched forward, had crashed down on Constantia, Josephine wouldn't have been surprised. On the

contrary, she would have thought it the only suitable thing to happen. But nothing happened. Only the room seemed quieter than ever, and bigger flakes of cold air fell on Josephine's shoulders and knees. She began to shiver.

'Come, Jug,' said Constantia, still with that awful callous smile; and Josephine followed just as she had that last time, when Constantia had pushed Benny into the round pond.

VII

But the strain told on them when they were back in the dining-room. They sat down, very shaky, and looked at each other.

'I don't feel I can settle to anything,' said Josephine, 'until I've had something. Do you think we could ask Kate for two cups of hot water?'

'I really don't see why we shouldn't,' said Constantia carefully. She was quite normal again. 'I won't ring. I'll go to the kitchen door and ask her.'

'Yes, do,' said Josephine, sinking down into a chair. 'Tell her, just two cups, Con, nothing else—on a tray.'

'She needn't even put the jug on, need she?' said Constantia, as though Kate might very well complain if the jug had been there.

'Oh, no, certainly not! The jug's not at all necessary. She can pour it direct out of the kettle,' cried Josephine, feeling that would be a labour-saving indeed.

Their cold lips quivered at the greenish brims. Josephine curved her small red hands round the cup; Constantia sat up and blew on the wavy stream, making it flutter from one side to the other.

'Speaking of Benny,' said Josephine.

And though Benny hadn't been mentioned Constantia immediately looked as though he had.

'He'll expect us to send him something of father's, of course. But it's so difficult to know what to send to Ceylon.'

'You mean things get unstuck so on the voyage,' murmured Constantia.

'No, lost,' said Josephine sharply. 'You know there's no post. Only runners.'

Both paused to watch a black man in white linen drawers running through the pale fields for dear life, with a large brown-paper parcel in his hands. Josephine's black man was tiny; he scurried along glistening like an ant. But there was something blind and tireless about Constantia's tall, thin fellow, which made him, she decided, a very unpleasant person indeed. . . . On the veranda, dressed all in white and wearing a cork helmet, stood Benny. His right hand shook up and down, as father's did when he was impatient. And behind him, not in the least interested, sat Hilda, the unknown sister-in-law. She swung in a cane rocker and flicked over the leaves of the *Tatler*.

'I think his watch would be the most suitable present,' said Josephine.

Constantia looked up; she seemed surprised.

'Oh, would you trust a gold watch to a native?'

'But of course I'd disguise it,' said Josephine. 'No one would know it was a watch.' She liked the idea of having to make a parcel such a curious shape that no one could possibly guess what it was. She even thought for a moment of hiding the watch in a narrow cardboard corset-box that she'd kept by her for a long time, waiting for it to come in for something. It was such beautiful firm cardboard. But, no, it wouldn't be appropriate for this occasion. It had lettering on it: *Medium Women's 28. Extra Firm Busks*. It would be almost too much of a surprise for Benny to open that and find father's watch inside.

'And of course it isn't as though it would be going—ticking, I mean,' said Constantia, who was still thinking of the native love of jewelery. 'At least,' she added, 'it would be very strange if after all that time it was.'

VIII

Josephine made no reply. She had flown off on one of her tangents. She had suddenly thought of Cyril. Wasn't it more usual for the only grandson to have the watch? And then dear Cyril was so

appreciative and a gold watch meant so much to a young man. Benny, in all probability, had quite got out of the habit of watches; men so seldom wore waistcoats in those hot climates. Whereas Cyril in London wore them from year's end to year's end. And it would be so nice for her and Constantia, when he came to tea, to know it was there. 'I see you've got on grandfather's watch, Cyril.' It would be somehow so satisfactory.

Dear boy! What a blow his sweet, sympathetic little note had been! Of course they quite understood; but it was most unfortunate.

'It would have been such a point, having him,' said Josephine.

'And he would have enjoyed it so,' said Constantia, not thinking what she was saying.

However, as soon as he got back he was coming to tea with his aunties. Cyril to tea was one of their rare treats.

'Now, Cyril, you mustn't be frightened of our cakes. Your Auntie Con and I bought them at Buszard's this morning. We know what a man's appetite is. So don't be ashamed of making a good tea.'

Josephine cut recklessly into the rich dark cake that stood for her winter gloves or the soling and heeling of Constantia's only respectable shoes. But Cyril was most unmanlike in appetite.

'I say, Aunt Josephine, I simply can't. I've only just had lunch, you know.'

'Oh, Cyril, that can't be true! It's after four,' cried Josephine. Constantia sat with her knife poised over the chocolate-roll.

'It is, all the same,' said Cyril. 'I had to meet a man at Victoria,² and he kept me hanging about till . . . there was only time to get lunch and to come on here. And he gave me—phew'—Cyril put his hand to his forehead—'a terrific blow-out,'³ he said.

It was disappointing—today of all days. But still he couldn't be expected to know.

'But you'll have a meringue, won't you, Cyril?' said Aunt Josephine. 'These meringues were bought specially for you. Your dear father was so fond of them. We were sure you are, too.'

'I *am*, Aunt Josephine,' cried Cyril ardently. 'Do you mind if I take half to begin with?'

'Not at all, dear boy; but we mustn't let you off with that.'

'Is your dear father still so fond of meringues?' asked Auntie Con gently. She winced faintly as she broke through the shell of hers.

'Well, I don't quite know, Auntie Con,' said Cyril breezily.

At that they both looked up.

'Don't know?' almost snapped Josephine. 'Don't know a thing like that about your own father, Cyril?'

'Surely,' said Auntie Con softly.

Cyril tried to laugh it off. 'Oh, well,' he said, 'it's such a long time since—' He faltered. He stopped. Their faces were too much for him.

'Even *so*,' said Josephine.

And Auntie Con looked.

Cyril put down his teacup. 'Wait a bit,' he cried. 'Wait a bit, Aunt Josephine. What am I thinking of?'

He looked up. They were beginning to brighten. Cyril slapped his knee.

'Of course,' he said, 'it was meringues. How could I have forgotten? Yes, Aunt Josephine, you're perfectly right. Father's most frightfully keen on meringues.'

They didn't only beam. Aunt Josephine went scarlet with pleasure; Auntie Con gave a deep, deep sigh.

'And now, Cyril, you must come and see father,' said Josephine. 'He knows you were coming today.'

'Right,' said Cyril, very firmly and heartily. He got up from his chair; suddenly he glanced at the clock.

'I say, Auntie Con, isn't your clock a bit slow? I've got to meet a man at—at Paddington⁴ just after five. I'm afraid I shan't be able to stay very long with grandfather.'

'Oh, he won't expect you to stay *very* long!' said Aunt Josephine.

Constantia was still gazing at the clock. She couldn't make up her mind if it was fast or slow. It was one or the other, she felt almost certain of that. At any rate, it had been.

Cyril still lingered. 'Aren't you coming along, Auntie Con?'
'Of course,' said Josephine, 'we shall all go. Come on, Con.'

IX

They knocked at the door, and Cyril followed his aunts into grandfather's hot, sweetish room.

'Come on,' said Grandfather Pinner. 'Don't hang about. What is it? What've you been up to?'

He was sitting in front of a roaring fire, clasping his stick. He had a thick rug over his knees. On his lap there lay a beautiful pale yellow silk handkerchief.

'It's Cyril, father,' said Josephine shyly. And she took Cyril's hand and led him forward.

'Good afternoon, grandfather,' said Cyril, trying to take his hand out of Aunt Josephine's. Grandfather Pinner shot his eyes at Cyril in the way he was famous for. Where was Auntie Con? She stood on the other side of Aunt Josephine; her long arms hung down in front of her; her hands were clasped. She never took her eyes off grandfather.

'Well,' said Grandfather Pinner, beginning to thump, 'what have you got to tell me?'

What had he, what had he got to tell him? Cyril felt himself smiling like a perfect imbecile. The room was stifling, too.

But Aunt Josephine came to his rescue. She cried brightly, 'Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues, father dear.'

'Eh?' said Grandfather Pinner, curving his hand like a purple meringue-shell over one ear.

Josephine repeated, 'Cyril says his father is still very fond of meringues.'

'Can't hear,' said old Colonel Pinner. And he waved Josephine away with his stick, then pointed with his stick to Cyril. 'Tell me what she's trying to say,' he said.

(My God!) 'Must I?' said Cyril, blushing and staring at Aunt Josephine.

'Do, dear,' she smiled. 'It will please him so much.'

'Come on, out with it!' cried Colonel Pinner testily, beginning to thump again.

And Cyril leaned forward and yelled, 'Father's still very fond of meringues.'

At that Grandfather Pinner jumped as though he had been shot.

'Don't shout!' he cried. 'What's the matter with the boy? Meringues! What about 'em?'

'Oh, Aunt Josephine, must we go on?' groaned Cyril desperately.

'It's quite all right, dear boy,' said Aunt Josephine, as though he and she were at the dentist's together. 'He'll understand in a minute.' And she whispered to Cyril, 'He's getting a bit deaf, you know.' Then she leaned forward and really bawled at Grandfather Pinner, 'Cyril only wanted to tell you, father dear, that his father is still very fond of meringues.'

Colonel Pinner heard that time, heard and brooded, looking Cyril up and down.

'What an esstrordinary thing!' said old Grandfather Pinner. 'What an esstrordinary thing to come all this way here to tell me!'

And Cyril felt it *was*.

'Yes, I shall send Cyril the watch,' said Josephine.

'That would be very nice,' said Constantia. 'I seem to remember last time he came there was some little trouble about the time.'

X

They were interrupted by Kate bursting through the door in her usual fashion, as though she had discovered some secret panel in the wall.

'Fried or boiled?' asked the bold voice.

Fried or boiled? Josephine and Constantia were quite bewildered for the moment. They could hardly take it in.

'Fried or boiled what, Kate?' asked Josephine, trying to begin to concentrate.

Kate gave a loud sniff. 'Fish.'

'Well, why didn't you say so immediately?' Josephine reproached her gently. 'How could you expect us to understand, Kate? There are a great many things in this world, you know, which are fried or boiled.' And after such a display of courage she said quite brightly to Constantia, 'Which do you prefer, Con?'

'I think it might be nice to have it fried,' said Constantia. 'On the other hand, of course boiled fish is very nice. I think I prefer both equally well . . . Unless you . . . In that case—'

'I shall fry it,' said Kate, and she bounced back, leaving their door open and slamming the door of her kitchen.

Josephine gazed at Constantia; she raised her pale eyebrows until they rippled away into her pale hair. She got up. She said in a very lofty, imposing way, 'Do you mind following me into the drawing-room, Constantia? I've something of great importance to discuss with you.'

For it was always to the drawing-room they retired when they wanted to talk over Kate.

Josephine closed the door meaningly. 'Sit down, Constantia,' she said, still very grand. She might have been receiving Constantia for the first time. And Con looked round vaguely for a chair, as though she felt indeed quite a stranger.

'Now the question is,' said Josephine, bending forward, 'whether we shall keep her or not.'

'That is the question,' agreed Constantia.

'And this time,' said Josephine firmly, 'we must come to a definite decision.'

Constantia looked for a moment as though she might begin going over all the other times, but she pulled herself together and said, 'Yes, Jug.'

'You see, Con,' explained Josephine, 'everything is so changed now.' Constantia looked up quickly. 'I mean,' went on Josephine, 'we're not dependent on Kate as we were.' And she blushed faintly. 'There's not father to cook for.'

'That is perfectly true,' agreed Constantia. 'Father certainly doesn't want any cooking now, whatever else—'

Josephine broke in sharply, 'You're not sleepy, are you, Con?'

'Sleepy, Jug?' Constantia was wide-eyed.

'Well, concentrate more,' said Josephine sharply, and she returned to the subject. 'What it comes to is, if we did'—and this she barely breathed, glancing at the door—'give Kate notice'—she raised her voice again—'we could manage our own food.'

'Why not?' cried Constantia. She couldn't help smiling. The idea was so exciting. She clasped her hands. 'What should we live on, Jug?'

'Oh, eggs in various forms!' said Jug, lofty again. 'And, besides, there are all the cooked foods.'

'But I've always heard,' said Constantia, 'they are considered so very expensive.'

'Not if one buys them in moderation,' said Josephine. But she tore herself away from this fascinating bypath and dragged Constantia after her.

'What we've got to decide now, however, is whether we really do trust Kate or not.'

Constantia leaned back. Her flat little laugh flew from her lips.

'Isn't it curious, Jug,' said she, 'that just on this one subject I've never been able to quite make up my mind?'

XI

She never had. The whole difficulty was to prove anything. How did one prove things, how could one? Suppose Kate had stood in front of her and deliberately made a face. Mightn't she very well have been in pain? Wasn't it impossible, at any rate, to ask Kate if she was making a face at her? If Kate answered 'No'—and of course she would say 'No'—what a position! How undignified! Then again Constantia suspected, she was almost certain that Kate went to her chest of drawers when she and Josephine were out, not to take things but to spy. Many times she had come back to find her

amethyst cross in the most unlikely places, under her lace ties or on top of her evening Bertha.⁵ More than once she had laid a trap for Kate. She had arranged things in a special order and then called Josephine to witness.

'You see, Jug?'

'Quite, Con.'

'Now we shall be able to tell.'

But, oh dear, when she did go to look, she was as far off from a proof as ever! If anything was displaced, it might so very well have happened as she closed the drawer; a jolt might have done it so easily.

'You come, Jug, and decide. I really can't. It's too difficult.'

But after a pause and a long glare Josephine would sigh. 'Now you've put the doubt into my mind, Con, I'm sure I can't tell myself.'

'Well, we can't postpone it again,' said Josephine. 'If we postpone it this time—'

XII

But at that moment in the street below a barrel-organ struck up. Josephine and Constantia sprang to their feet together.

'Run, Con,' said Josephine. 'Run quickly. There's sixpence on the —'

Then they remembered. It didn't matter. They would never have to stop the organ-grinder again. Never again would she and Constantia be told to make that monkey take his noise somewhere else. Never would sound that loud, strange bellow when father thought they were not hurrying enough. The organ-grinder might play there all day and the stick would not thump.

It never will thump again,
It never will thump again,

played the barrel-organ.

What was Constantia thinking? She had such a strange smile; she looked different. She couldn't be going to cry.

'Jug, Jug,' said Constantia softly, pressing her hands together. 'Do you know what day it is? It's Saturday. It's a week today, a whole week.'

A week since father died,
A week since father died,

cried the barrel-organ. And Josephine, too, forgot to be practical and sensible; she smiled faintly, strangely. On the Indian carpet there fell a square of sunlight, pale red; it came and went and came—and stayed, deepened—until it shone almost golden.

'The sun's out,' said Josephine, as though it really mattered.

A perfect fountain of bubbling notes shook from the barrel-organ, round, bright notes, carelessly scattered.

Constantia lifted her big, cold hands as if to catch them, and then her hands fell again. She walked over to the mantelpiece to her favourite Buddha. And the stone and gilt image, whose smile always gave her such a queer feeling, almost a pain and yet a pleasant pain, seemed today to be more than smiling. He knew something; he had a secret. 'I know something that you don't know,' said her Buddha. Oh, what was it, what could it be? And yet she had always felt there was . . . something.

The sunlight pressed through the windows, thieved its way in, flashed its light over the furniture and the photographs. Josephine watched it. When it came to mother's photograph, the enlargement over the piano, it lingered as though puzzled to find so little remained of mother, except the ear-rings shaped like tiny pagodas and a black feather boa. Why did the photographs of dead people always fade so? wondered Josephine. As soon as a person was dead their photograph died too. But, of course, this one of mother was very old. It was thirty-five years old. Josephine remembered standing on a chair and pointing out that feather boa to Constantia and telling her that it was a snake that had killed their mother in Ceylon. . . . Would everything have been different if mother hadn't died? She didn't see why. Aunt Florence had lived with them until they had left school, and they had moved three times and had their

yearly holiday and . . . and there'd been changes of servants, of course.

Some little sparrows, young sparrows they sounded, chirped on the window-ledge. *Yeep—eyeep—yeep*. But Josephine felt they were not sparrows, not on the window-ledge. It was inside her, that queer little crying noise. *Yeep—eyeep—yeep*. Ah, what was it crying, so weak and forlorn?

If mother had lived, might they have married? But there had been nobody for them to marry. There had been father's Anglo-Indian friends before he quarreled with them. But after that she and Constantia never met a single man except clergymen. How did one meet men? Or even if they'd met them, how could they have got to know men well enough to be more than strangers? One read of people having adventures, being followed, and so on. But nobody had ever followed Constantia and her. Oh yes, there had been one year at Eastbourne⁶ a mysterious man at their boarding-house who had put a note on the jug of hot water outside their bedroom door! But by the time Connie had found it the steam had made the writing too faint to read; they couldn't even make out to which of them it was addressed. And he had left next day. And that was all. The rest had been looking after father and at the same time keeping out of father's way. But now? But now? The thieving sun touched Josephine gently. She lifted her face. She was drawn over to the window by gentle beams. . . .

Until the barrel-organ stopped playing Constantia stayed before the Buddha, wondering, but not as usual, not vaguely. This time her wonder was like longing. She remembered the times she had come in here, crept out of bed in her nightgown when the moon was full, and lain on the floor with her arms outstretched, as though she was crucified. Why? The big, pale moon had made her do it. The horrible dancing figures on the carved screen had leered at her and she hadn't minded. She remembered too how, whenever they were at the seaside, she had gone off by herself and got as close to the sea as she could, and sung something, something she had made up, while she gazed all over that restless water. There had been this

other life, running out, bringing things home in bags, getting things on approval, discussing them with Jug, and taking them back to get more things on approval, and arranging father's trays and trying not to annoy father. But it all seemed to have happened in a kind of tunnel. It wasn't real. It was only when she came out of the tunnel into the moonlight or by the sea or into a thunderstorm that she really felt herself. What did it mean? What was it she was always wanting? What did it all lead to? Now? Now?

She turned away from the Buddha with one of her vague gestures. She went over to where Josephine was standing. She wanted to say something to Josephine, something frightfully important, about—about the future and what . . .

'Don't you think perhaps—' she began.

But Josephine interrupted her. 'I was wondering if now—' she murmured. They stopped; they waited for each other.

'Go on, Con,' said Josephine.

'No, no, Jug; after you,' said Constantia.

'No, say what you were going to say. You began,' said Josephine.

'I . . . I'd rather hear what you were going to say first,' said Constantia.

'Don't be absurd, Con.'

'Really, Jug.'

'Connie!'

'Oh, *Jug!*'

A pause. Then Constantia said faintly, 'I can't say what I was going to say, Jug, because I've forgotten what it was . . . that I was going to say.'

Josephine was silent for a moment. She stared at a big cloud where the sun had been. Then she replied shortly, 'I've forgotten too.'

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Endnotes

- Note 1: A gelatinous dessert.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London railroad station, connecting with the Channel ports.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Feast.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: London railroad station, serving the west of England and Wales.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Detachable lace collar for low-necked dresses.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Seaside resort on Sussex coast.[Return to reference 6](#)

The Garden Party¹

And after all the weather was ideal. They could not have had a more perfect day for a garden party if they had ordered it. Windless, warm, the sky without a cloud. Only the blue was veiled with a haze of light gold, as it is sometimes in early summer. The gardener had been up since dawn, mowing the lawns and sweeping them, until the grass and the dark flat rosettes where the daisy plants had been seemed to shine. As for the roses, you could not help feeling they understood that roses are the only flowers that impress people at garden parties; the only flowers that everybody is certain of knowing. Hundreds, yes, literally hundreds, had come out in a single night; the green bushes bowed down as though they had been visited by archangels.

Breakfast was not yet over before the men came to put up the marquee.

'Where do you want the marquee put, mother?'

'My dear child, it's no use asking me. I'm determined to leave everything to you children this year. Forget I am your mother. Treat me as an honoured guest.'

But Meg could not possibly go and supervise the men. She had washed her hair before breakfast, and she sat drinking her coffee in a green turban, with a dark wet curl stamped on each cheek. Jose, the butterfly, always came down in a silk petticoat and a kimono jacket.

'You'll have to go, Laura; you're the artistic one.'

Away Laura flew, still holding her piece of bread-and-butter. It's so delicious to have an excuse for eating out of doors, and besides, she loved having to arrange things; she always felt she could do it so much better than anybody else.

Four men in their shirt-sleeves stood grouped together on the garden path. They carried staves covered with rolls of canvas, and

they had big tool-bags slung on their backs. They looked impressive. Laura wished now that she had not got the bread-and-butter, but there was nowhere to put it, and she couldn't possibly throw it away. She blushed and tried to look severe and even a little bit short-sighted as she came up to them.

'Good morning,' she said, copying her mother's voice. But that sounded so fearfully affected that she was ashamed, and stammered like a little girl, 'Oh—er—have you come—is it about the marquee?'

'That's right, miss,' said the tallest of the men, a lanky, freckled fellow, and he shifted his tool-bag, knocked back his straw hat and smiled down at her. 'That's about it.'

His smile was so easy, so friendly that Laura recovered. What nice eyes he had, small, but such a dark blue! And now she looked at the others, they were smiling too. 'Cheer up, we won't bite,' their smile seemed to say. How very nice workmen were! And what a beautiful morning! She mustn't mention the morning; she must be business-like. The marquee.

'Well, what about the lily-lawn? Would that do?'

And she pointed to the lily-lawn with the hand that didn't hold the bread-and-butter. They turned, they stared in the direction. A little fat chap thrust out his under-lip, and the tall fellow frowned.

'I don't fancy it,' said he. 'Not conspicuous enough. You see, with a thing like a marquee,' and he turned to Laura in his easy way, 'you want to put it somewhere where it'll give you a bang slap in the eye, if you follow me.'

Laura's upbringing made her wonder for a moment whether it was quite respectful of a workman to talk to her of bangs slap in the eye. But she did quite follow him.

'A corner of the tennis-court,' she suggested. 'But the band's going to be in one corner.'

'H'm, going to have a band, are you?' said another of the workmen. He was pale. He had a haggard look as his dark eyes scanned the tennis-court. What was he thinking?

'Only a very small band,' said Laura gently. Perhaps he wouldn't mind so much if the band was quite small. But the tall fellow

interrupted.

'Look here, miss, that's the place. Against those trees. Over there. That'll do fine.'

Against the karakas. Then the karaka-trees would be hidden. And they were so lovely, with their broad, gleaming leaves, and their clusters of yellow fruit. They were like trees you imagined growing on a desert island, proud, solitary, lifting their leaves and fruits to the sun in a kind of silent splendour. Must they be hidden by a marquee?

They must. Already the men had shouldered their staves and were making for the place. Only the tall fellow was left. He bent down, pinched a sprig of lavender, put his thumb and forefinger to his nose and snuffed up the smell. When Laura saw that gesture she forgot all about the karakas in her wonder at him caring for things like that—caring for the smell of lavender. How many men that she knew would have done such a thing? Oh, how extraordinarily nice workmen were, she thought. Why couldn't she have workmen for friends rather than the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper? She would get on much better with men like these.

It's all the fault, she decided, as the tall fellow drew something on the back of an envelope, something that was to be looped up or left to hang, of these absurd class distinctions. Well, for her part, she didn't feel them. Not a bit, not an atom . . . And now there came the chock-chock of wooden hammers. Some one whistled, some one sang out, 'Are you right there, matey?' 'Matey!' The friendliness of it, the—the—Just to prove how happy she was, just to show the tall fellow how at home she felt, and how she despised stupid conventions, Laura took a big bite of her bread-and-butter as she stared at the little drawing. She felt just like a work-girl.

'Laura, Laura, where are you? Telephone, Laura!' a voice cried from the house.

'Coming!' Away she skimmed, over the lawn, up the path, up the steps, across the veranda, and into the porch. In the hall her father and Laurie were brushing their hats ready to go to the office.

'I say, Laura,' said Laurie very fast, 'you might just give a squiz² at my coat before this afternoon. See if it wants pressing.'

'I will,' said she. Suddenly she couldn't stop herself. She ran at Laurie and gave him a small, quick squeeze. 'Oh, I do love parties, don't you?' gasped Laura.

'Ra-ther,' said Laurie's warm, boyish voice, and he squeezed his sister too, and gave her a gentle push. 'Dash off to the telephone, old girl.'

The telephone. 'Yes, yes; oh yes. Kitty? Good morning, dear. Come to lunch? Do, dear. Delighted of course. It will only be a very scratch meal—just the sandwich crusts and broken meringue-shells and what's left over. Yes, isn't it a perfect morning? Your white? Oh, I certainly should. One moment—hold the line. Mother's calling.' And Laura sat back. 'What, mother? Can't hear.'

Mrs Sheridan's voice floated down the stairs. 'Tell her to wear that sweet hat she had on last Sunday.'

'Mother says you're to wear that sweet hat you had on last Sunday. Good. One o'clock. Bye-bye.'

Laura put back the receiver, flung her arms over her head, took a deep breath, stretched and let them fall. 'Huh,' she sighed, and the moment after the sigh she sat up quickly. She was still, listening. All the doors in the house seemed to be open. The house was alive with soft, quick steps and running voices. The green baize³ door that led to the kitchen regions swung open and shut with a muffled thud. And now there came a long, chuckling absurd sound. It was the heavy piano being moved on its stiff castors. But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? Little faint winds were playing chase in at the tops of the windows, out at the doors. And there were two tiny spots of sun, one on the inkpot, one on a silver photograph frame, playing too. Darling little spots. Especially the one on the inkpot lid. It was quite warm. A warm little silver star. She could have kissed it.

The front door bell pealed, and there sounded the rustle of Sadie's print skirt on the stairs. A man's voice murmured; Sadie

answered, careless, 'I'm sure I don't know. Wait. I'll ask Mrs Sheridan.'

'What is it, Sadie?' Laura came into the hall.

'It's the florist, Miss Laura.'

It was, indeed. There, just inside the door, stood a wide, shallow tray full of pots of pink lilies. No other kind. Nothing but lilies—canna lilies, big pink flowers, wide open, radiant, almost frighteningly alive on bright crimson stems.

'O-oh, Sadie!' said Laura, and the sound was like a little moan. She crouched down as if to warm herself at that blaze of lilies; she felt they were in her fingers, on her lips, growing in her breast.

'It's some mistake,' she said faintly. 'Nobody ever ordered so many. Sadie, go and find mother.'

But at that moment Mrs Sheridan joined them.

'It's quite right,' she said calmly. 'Yes, I ordered them. Aren't they lovely?' She pressed Laura's arm. 'I was passing the shop yesterday, and I saw them in the window. And I suddenly thought for once in my life I shall have enough canna lilies. The garden party will be a good excuse.'

'But I thought you said you didn't mean to interfere,' said Laura. Sadie had gone. The florist's man was still outside at his van. She put her arm round her mother's neck and gently, very gently, she bit her mother's ear.

'My darling child, you wouldn't like a logical mother, would you? Don't do that. Here's the man.'

He carried more lilies still, another whole tray.

'Bank them up, just inside the door, on both sides of the porch, please,' said Mrs Sheridan. 'Don't you agree, Laura?'

'Oh, I *do* mother.'

In the drawing-room Meg, Jose and good little Hans had at last succeeded in moving the piano.

'Now, if we put this chesterfield against the wall and move everything out of the room except the chairs, don't you think?'

'Quite.'

'Hans, move these tables into the smoking-room, and bring a sweeper to take these marks off the carpet and—one moment, Hans —' Jose loved giving orders to the servants, and they loved obeying her. She always made them feel they were taking part in some drama. 'Tell mother and Miss Laura to come here at once.'

'Very good, Miss Jose.'

She turned to Meg. 'I want to hear what the piano sounds like, just in case I'm asked to sing this afternoon. Let's try over "This Life is Weary." '

Pom! Ta-ta-ta Tee-ta! The piano burst out so passionately that Jose's face changed. She clasped her hands. She looked mournfully and enigmatically at her mother and Laura as they came in.

This Life is *Wee*-ary,
A Tear—a Sigh.
A Love that *Chan*-ges,
This Life is *Wee*-ary,
A Tear—a Sigh.
A Love that *Chan*-ges,
And then . . . Good-bye!

But at the word 'Good-bye,' and although the piano sounded more desperate than ever, her face broke into a brilliant, dreadfully unsympathetic smile.

'Aren't I in good voice, mummy?' she beamed.

This Life is *Wee*-ary,
Hope comes to Die.
A Dream—a *Wa*-kening.

But now Sadie interrupted them. 'What is it, Sadie?'

'If you please, m'm, cook says have you got the flags⁴ for the sandwiches?'

'The flags for the sandwiches, Sadie?' echoed Mrs Sheridan dreamily. And the children knew by her face that she hadn't got

them. 'Let me see.' And she said to Sadie firmly, 'Tell cook I'll let her have them in ten minutes.'

Sadie went.

'Now, Laura,' said her mother quickly. 'Come with me into the smoking-room. I've got the names⁵ somewhere on the back of an envelope. You'll have to write them out for me. Meg, go upstairs this minute and take that wet thing off your head. Jose, run and finish dressing this instant. Do you hear me, children, or shall I have to tell your father when he comes home to-night? And—and, Jose, pacify cook if you do go into the kitchen, will you? I'm terrified of her this morning.'

The envelope was found at last behind the dining-room clock, though how it had got there Mrs Sheridan could not imagine.

'One of you children must have stolen it out of my bag, because I remember vividly—cream cheese and lemon-curd. Have you done that?'

'Yes.'

'Egg and—' Mrs Sheridan held the envelope away from her. 'It looks like mice. It can't be mice, can it?'

'Olive, pet,' said Laura, looking over her shoulder.

'Yes, of course, olive. What a horrible combination it sounds. Egg and olive.'

They were finished at last, and Laura took them off to the kitchen. She found Jose there pacifying the cook, who did not look at all terrifying.

'I have never seen such exquisite sandwiches,' said Jose's rapturous voice. 'How many kinds did you say there were, cook? Fifteen?'

'Fifteen, Miss Jose.'

'Well, cook, I congratulate you.'

Cook swept up crusts with the long sandwich knife and smiled broadly.

'Godber's has come,' announced Sadie, issuing out of the pantry. She had seen the man pass the window.

That meant the cream puffs had come. Godber's were famous for their cream puffs. Nobody ever thought of making them at home.

'Bring them in and put them on the table, my girl,' ordered cook.

Sadie brought them in and went back to the door. Of course Laura and Jose were far too grown-up to really care about such things. All the same, they couldn't help agreeing that the puffs looked very attractive. Very. Cook began arranging them, shaking off the extra icing sugar.

'Don't they carry one back to all one's parties?' said Laura.

'I suppose they do,' said practical Jose, who never liked to be carried back. 'They look beautifully light and feathery, I must say.'

'Have one each, my dears,' said cook in her comfortable voice. 'Yer ma won't know.'

Oh, impossible. Fancy cream puffs so soon after breakfast. The very idea made one shudder. All the same, two minutes later Jose and Laura were licking their fingers with that absorbed inward look that only comes from whipped cream.

'Let's go into the garden, out by the back way,' suggested Laura. 'I want to see how the men are getting on with the marquee. They're such awfully nice men.'

But the back door was blocked by cook, Sadie, Godber's man and Hans.

Something had happened.

'Tuk-tuk-tuk,' clucked cook like an agitated hen. Sadie had her hand clapped to her cheek as though she had toothache. Hans's face was screwed up in the effort to understand. Only Godber's man seemed to be enjoying himself; it was his story.

'What's the matter? What's happened?'

'There's been a horrible accident,' said cook. 'A man killed.'

'A man killed! Where? How? When?'

But Godber's man wasn't going to have his story snatched from under his very nose.

'Know those little cottages just below here, miss?' Know them? Of course, she knew them. 'Well, there's a young chap living there,

name of Scott, a carter. His horse shied at a traction-engine, corner of Hawke Street this morning, and he was thrown out on the back of his head. Killed.'

'Dead!' Laura stared at Godber's man.

'Dead when they picked him up,' said Godber's man with relish. 'They were taking the body home as I come up here.' And he said to the cook, 'He's left a wife and five little ones.'

'Jose, come here.' Laura caught hold of her sister's sleeve and dragged her through the kitchen to the other side of the green baize door. There she paused and leaned against it. 'Jose!' she said, horrified, 'however are we going to stop everything?'

'Stop everything, Laura!' cried Jose in astonishment. 'What do you mean?'

'Stop the garden party, of course.' Why did Jose pretend?

But Jose was still more amazed. 'Stop the garden party? My dear Laura, don't be so absurd. Of course we can't do anything of the kind. Nobody expects us to. Don't be so extravagant.'

'But we can't possibly have a garden party with a man dead just outside the front gate.'

That really was extravagant, for the little cottages were in a lane to themselves at the very bottom of a steep rise that led up to the house. A broad road ran between. True, they were far too near. They were the greatest possible eyesore, and they had no right to be in that neighbourhood at all. They were little mean dwellings painted a chocolate brown. In the garden patches there was nothing but cabbage stalks, sick hens and tomato cans. The very smoke coming out of their chimneys was poverty-stricken. Little rags and shreds of smoke, so unlike the great silvery plumes that uncurled from the Sheridans' chimneys. Washerwomen lived in the lane and sweeps and a cobbler, and a man whose house-front was studded all over with minute bird-cages. Children swarmed. When the Sheridans were little they were forbidden to set foot there because of the revolting language and of what they might catch. But since they were grown up, Laura and Laurie on their prowls sometimes walked through. It was disgusting and sordid. They came out with a

shudder. But still one must go everywhere; one must see everything. So through they went.

'And just think of what the band would sound like to that poor woman,' said Laura.

'Oh, Laura!' Jose began to be seriously annoyed. 'If you're going to stop a band playing every time some one has an accident, you'll lead a very strenuous life. I'm every bit as sorry about it as you. I feel just as sympathetic.' Her eyes hardened. She looked at her sister just as she used to when they were little and fighting together. 'You won't bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental,' she said softly.

'Drunk! Who said he was drunk?' Laura turned furiously on Jose. She said, just as they had used to say on those occasions, 'I'm going straight up to tell mother.'

'Do, dear,' cooed Jose.

'Mother, can I come into your room?' Laura turned the big glass door-knob.

'Of course, child. Why, what's the matter? What's given you such a colour?' And Mrs Sheridan turned round from her dressing-table. She was trying on a new hat.

'Mother, a man's been killed,' began Laura.

'Not in the garden?' interrupted her mother.

'No, no!'

'Oh, what a fright you gave me!' Mrs Sheridan sighed with relief, and took off the big hat and held it on her knees.

'But listen, mother,' said Laura. Breathless, half-choking, she told the dreadful story. 'Of course, we can't have our party, can we?' she pleaded. 'The band and everybody arriving. They'd hear us, mother; they're nearly neighbours!'

To Laura's astonishment her mother behaved just like Jose; it was harder to bear because she seemed amused. She refused to take Laura seriously.

'But, my dear child, use your common sense. It's only by accident we've heard of it. If some one had died there normally—and I can't

understand how they keep alive in those poky little holes—we should still be having our party, shouldn't we?'

Laura had to say 'yes' to that, but she felt it was all wrong. She sat down on her mother's sofa and pinched the cushion frill.

'Mother, isn't it really terribly heartless of us?' she asked.

'Darling!' Mrs Sheridan got up and came over to her, carrying the hat. Before Laura could stop her she had popped it on. 'My child!' said her mother, 'the hat is yours. It's made for you. It's much too young for me. I have never seen you look such a picture. Look at yourself!' And she held up her hand-mirror.

'But, mother,' Laura began again. She couldn't look at herself; she turned aside.

This time Mrs Sheridan lost patience just as Jose had done.

'You are being very absurd, Laura,' she said coldly. 'People like that don't expect sacrifices from us. And it's not very sympathetic to spoil everybody's enjoyment as you're doing now.'

'I don't understand,' said Laura, and she walked quickly out of the room into her own bedroom. There, quite by chance, the first thing she saw was this charming girl in the mirror, in her black hat trimmed with gold daisies, and a long black velvet ribbon. Never had she imagined she could look like that. Is mother right? she thought. And now she hoped her mother was right. Am I being extravagant? Perhaps it was extravagant. Just for a moment she had another glimpse of that poor woman and those little children, and the body being carried into the house. But it all seemed blurred, unreal, like a picture in the newspaper. I'll remember it again after the party's over, she decided. And somehow that seemed quite the best plan . . .

Lunch was over by half past one. By half past two they were all ready for the fray. The green-coated band had arrived and was established in a corner of the tennis-court.

'My dear!' trilled Kitty Maitland, 'aren't they too like frogs for words? You ought to have arranged them round the pond with the conductor in the middle on a leaf.'

Laurie arrived and hailed them on his way to dress. At the sight of him Laura remembered the accident again. She wanted to tell him. If Laurie agreed with the others, then it was bound to be all right. And she followed him into the hall.

'Laurie!'

'Hallo!' He was half-way upstairs, but when he turned round and saw Laura he suddenly puffed out his cheeks and goggled his eyes at her. 'My word, Laura! You do look stunning,' said Laurie. 'What an absolutely topping hat!'

Laura said faintly 'Is it?' and smiled up at Laurie, and didn't tell him after all.

Soon after that people began coming in streams. The band struck up; the hired waiters ran from the house to the marquee. Wherever you looked there were couples strolling, bending to the flowers, greeting, moving on over the lawn. They were like bright birds that had alighted in the Sheridans' garden for this one afternoon, on their way to—where? Ah, what happiness it is to be with people who all are happy, to press hands, press cheeks, smile into eyes.

'Darling Laura, how well you look!'

'What a becoming hat, child!'

'Laura, you look quite Spanish. I've never seen you look so striking.'

And Laura, glowing, answered softly, 'Have you had tea? Won't you have an ice? The passion-fruit ices really are rather special.' She ran to her father and begged him. 'Daddy darling, can't the band have something to drink?'

And the perfect afternoon slowly ripened, slowly faded, slowly its petals closed.

'Never a more delightful garden party . . .' 'The greatest success . . .' 'Quite the most . . .'

Laura helped her mother with the goodbyes. They stood side by side in the porch till it was all over.

'All over, all over, thank heaven,' said Mrs Sheridan. 'Round up the others, Laura. Let's go and have some fresh coffee. I'm exhausted.'

Yes, it's been very successful. But oh, these parties, these parties! Why will you children insist on giving parties!' And they all of them sat down in the deserted marquee.

'Have a sandwich, daddy dear. I wrote the flag.'

'Thanks.' Mr Sheridan took a bite and the sandwich was gone. He took another. 'I suppose you didn't hear of a beastly accident that happened today?' he said.

'My dear,' said Mrs Sheridan, holding up her hand, 'we did. It nearly ruined the party. Laura insisted we should put it off.'

'Oh, mother!' Laura didn't want to be teased about it.

'It was a horrible affair all the same,' said Mr Sheridan. 'The chap was married too. Lived just below in the lane, and leaves a wife and half a dozen kiddies, so they say.'

An awkward little silence fell. Mrs Sheridan fidgeted with her cup. Really, it was very tactless of father . . .

Suddenly she looked up. There on the table were all those sandwiches, cakes, puffs, all un-eaten, all going to be wasted. She had one of her brilliant ideas.

'I know,' she said. 'Let's make up a basket. Let's send that poor creature some of this perfectly good food. At any rate, it will be the greatest treat for the children. Don't you agree? And she's sure to have neighbours calling in and so on. What a point to have it all ready prepared. Laura!' She jumped up. 'Get me the big basket out of the stairs cupboard.'

'But, mother, do you really think it's a good idea?' said Laura.

Again, how curious, she seemed to be different from them all. To take scraps from their party. Would the poor woman really like that?

'Of course! What's the matter with you today? An hour or two ago you were insisting on us being sympathetic, and now—'

Oh well! Laura ran for the basket. It was filled, it was heaped by her mother.

'Take it yourself, darling,' said she. 'Run down just as you are. No, wait, take the arum lilies too. People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.'

'The stems will ruin her lace frock,' said practical Jose.

So they would. Just in time. 'Only the basket, then. And, Laura!'—her mother followed her out of the marquee—'don't on any account—'

'What mother?'

No, better not put such ideas into the child's head! 'Nothing! Run along.'

It was just growing dusky as Laura shut their garden gates. A big dog ran by like a shadow. The road gleamed white, and down below in the hollow the little cottages were in deep shade. How quiet it seemed after the afternoon. Here she was going down the hill to somewhere where a man lay dead, and she couldn't realize it. Why couldn't she? She stopped a minute. And it seemed to her that kisses, voices, tinkling spoons, laughter, the smell of crushed grass were somehow inside her. She had no room for anything else. How strange! She looked up at the pale sky, and all she thought was, 'Yes, it was the most successful.'

Now the broad road was crossed. The lane began, smoky and dark. Women in shawls and men's tweed caps hurried by. Men hung over the palings; the children played in the doorways. A low hum came from the mean little cottages. In some of them there was a flicker of light, and a shadow, crab-like, moved across the window. Laura bent her head and hurried on. She wished now she had put on a coat. How her frock shone! And the big hat with the velvet streamer—if only it was another hat! Were the people looking at her? They must be. It was a mistake to have come; she knew all along it was a mistake. Should she go back even now?

No, too late. This was the house. It must be. A dark knot of people stood outside. Beside the gate an old, old woman with a crutch sat in a chair, watching. She had her feet on a newspaper. The voices stopped as Laura drew near. The group parted. It was as though she was expected, as though they had known she was coming here.

Laura was terribly nervous. Tossing the velvet ribbon over her shoulder, she said to a woman standing by, 'Is this Mrs Scott's

house?’ and the woman, smiling queerly, said, ‘It is, my lass.’

Oh, to be away from this! She actually said, ‘Help me, God,’ as she walked up the tiny path and knocked. To be away from those staring eyes, or to be covered up in anything, one of those women’s shawls even. I’ll just leave the basket and go, she decided. I shan’t even wait for it to be emptied.

Then the door opened. A little woman in black showed in the gloom.

Laura said, ‘Are you Mrs Scott?’ But to her horror the woman answered, ‘Walk in please, miss,’ and she was shut in the passage.

‘No,’ said Laura, ‘I don’t want to come in. I only want to leave this basket. Mother sent—’

The little woman in the gloomy passage seemed not to have heard her. ‘Step this way, please, miss,’ she said in an oily voice, and Laura followed her.

She found herself in a wretched little low kitchen, lighted by a smoky lamp. There was a woman sitting before the fire.

‘Em,’ said the little creature who had let her in. ‘Em! It’s a young lady.’ She turned to Laura. She said meaningly, ‘I’m her sister, Miss. You’ll excuse ‘er, won’t you?’

‘Oh, but of course!’ said Laura. ‘Please, please don’t disturb her. I—I only want to leave—’

But at that moment the woman at the fire turned round. Her face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips, looked terrible. She seemed as though she couldn’t understand why Laura was there. What did it mean? Why was this stranger standing in the kitchen with a basket? What was it all about? And the poor face puckered up again.

‘All right, my dear,’ said the other. ‘I’ll thenk the young lady.’

And again she began, ‘You’ll excuse her, miss, I’m sure,’ and her face, swollen too, tried an oily smile.

Laura only wanted to get out, to get away. She was back in the passage. The door opened. She walked straight through into the bedroom where the dead man was lying.

'You'd like a look at 'im, wouldn't you?' said Em's sister, and she brushed past Laura over to the bed. 'Don't be afraid, my lass,'—and now her voice sounded fond and sly, and fondly she drew down the sheet—' 'e looks a picture. There's nothing to show. Come along, my dear.'

Laura came.

There lay a young man, fast asleep—sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again. His head was sunk in the pillow, his eyes were closed; they were blind under the closed eyelids. He was given up to his dream. What did garden parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. While they were laughing and while the band was playing, this marvel had come to the lane. Happy . . . happy . . . All is well, said that sleeping face. This is just as it should be. I am content.

But all the same you had to cry, and she couldn't go out of the room without saying something to him. Laura gave a loud childish sob.

'Forgive my hat,' she said.

And this time she didn't wait for Em's sister. She found her way out of the door, down the path, past all those dark people. At the corner of the lane she met Laurie.

He stepped out of the shadow. 'Is that you, Laura?'

'Yes.'

'Mother was getting anxious. Was it all right?'

'Yes, quite. Oh, Laurie!' She took his arm, she pressed up against him.

'I say, you're not crying, are you?' asked her brother.

Laura shook her head. She was.

Laurie put his arm round her shoulder. 'Don't cry,' he said in his warm, loving voice. 'Was it awful?'

'No,' sobbed Laura. 'It was simply marvellous. But, Laurie—' She stopped, she looked at her brother. 'Isn't life,' she stammered, 'isn't

life—' But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.

'Isn't it, darling?' said Laurie.

19211922

Endnotes

- Note 1: This story draws on an incident from Mansfield's life. In March 1907 her mother gave a party in their Wellington house; that morning a man living in a more modest area nearby was killed in a street accident.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Glance.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Coarse woolen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Little paper flags stuck in a plate of small triangular sandwiches indicating what is inside the sandwiches on each plate—an English custom adopted by the New Zealand middle class as a sign of gentility.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the names of the sandwich fillings to be written on each flag.[Return to reference 5](#)

JEAN RHYS

1890–1979

Jean Rhys was born Ella Gwendolen Rees Williams on the small island of Dominica in the West Indies. Her father was a Welsh doctor; her mother, a Creole (that is, a White West Indian) descended from wealthy plantation owners who were also enslavers. Rhys was educated at a convent school in Roseau, Dominica, before, at the age of seventeen, leaving the island to attend the Perse School in Cambridge, England; she returned to her birthplace only once, in 1936. Her feelings toward her Caribbean background and childhood were mixed: she deeply appreciated the rich sensations and cross-racial engagements of her tropical experience; haunted by the knowledge of her violent heritage, however, she carried a heavy burden of historical guilt. As a West Indian she felt estranged from mainstream European culture and identified with the suffering of African Caribbeans, yet as a White Creole she grew up feeling out of place amid the predominantly Black population of Dominica.

After studying briefly at the Academy of Dramatic Art in London, Rhys worked as a traveling chorus girl, model, film extra, and—during World War I—volunteer cook. In 1919 she left England to marry the first of three husbands, and for many years she lived abroad, mainly in Paris, where she began to write the stories of her first book, *The Left Bank: Sketches and Studies of Present-Day Bohemian Paris* (1927). It was published with an introduction by the established novelist and poet Ford Madox Ford, who was for a time

her lover. Ford grasped the link between Rhys's vulnerability as a person and her strength as a writer; he perceived her "terrifying insight . . . and passion for stating the case of the underdog." Rhys declared, "I have only ever written about myself," and indeed much of her writing is semiautobiographical. Her fiction frequently depicts single, economically precarious women, rootless outsiders living in bohemian London or Paris. Her early sketches were followed by her first novel, *Postures* (1928, reprinted as *Quartet* in 1969), in part an account of her affair with Ford; *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930), about sexual betrayal; *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), the story of a nineteen-year-old chorus girl in London who has come from Dominica; and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), another first-person narrative of a lonely drifter, this time in Paris.

For many years Rhys published nothing more, dropping out of sight and often living in poverty, until, following the enthusiastic reception of a radio adaptation of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1957, she began to work in earnest on her masterpiece, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). In this novel, set in Jamaica and Dominica in the 1830s and 1840s, Rhys returns to her Caribbean childhood and, in a brilliant act of imaginative sympathy, creates a West Indian prehistory for the first Mrs. Rochester, the "madwoman in the attic" of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Altogether Rhys worked on the novel for twenty-one years, amid bouts of depression, loneliness, and alcoholism, but its immediate acclaim gave her the recognition she had so long been denied. She continued to publish works of fiction and autobiography, and in the year before her death received the Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, some of Rhys's published short stories draw on her Caribbean youth. Books, narratives, and fiction itself figure prominently in some of these stories. In "The Day They Burned the Books," set in the West Indies, a White girl who only partly understands the painful entanglements of class, race, and prejudice tells how a lower-class Englishman has accumulated a trove of books he values for their cultural prestige, while his mixed-race wife, embittered by her husband's racism, comes to despise

them as emblems of British imperial oppression. In "On Not Shooting Sitting Birds," the narrator recalls an awkward date when she was twenty-two years old and tried to impress a snooty young Englishman with a story from her childhood in Dominica. Tailoring her story within a story to fit ideas about Englishmen in novels she has read, the narrator finds herself trapped in a lie.

Rhys is one of the great prose stylists of the twentieth century, her language spare yet lyrical, her sentences exactly written and rewritten to suggest the most in the fewest possible words. Her writing is almost painfully alert to sensory detail, sensitive to the fears and longings of marginalized people, and fierce in its unmasking of the social and psychic consequences of cruelty and injustice.

The Day They Burned the Books

My friend Eddie was a small, thin boy. You could see the blue veins in his wrists and temples. People said that he had consumption¹ and wasn't long for this world. I loved, but sometimes despised him.

His father, Mr Sawyer, was a strange man. Nobody could make out what he was doing in our part of the world at all. He was not a planter or a doctor or a lawyer or a banker. He didn't keep a store. He wasn't a schoolmaster or a government official. He wasn't—that was the point—a gentleman. We had several resident romantics who had fallen in love with the moon on the Caribees²—they were all gentlemen and quite unlike Mr Sawyer who hadn't an 'h' in his composition.³ Besides, he detested the moon and everything else about the Caribbean and he didn't mind telling you so.

He was agent for a small steamship line which in those days linked up Venezuela and Trinidad⁴ with the smaller islands, but he couldn't make much out of that. He must have a private income, people decided, but they never decided why he had chosen to settle in a place he didn't like and to marry a coloured woman. Though a decent, respectable, nicely educated coloured woman, mind you.

Mrs Sawyer must have been very pretty once but, what with one thing and another, that was in days gone by.

When Mr Sawyer was drunk—this often happened—he used to be very rude to her. She never answered him.

'Look at the nigger showing off,' he would say; and she would smile as if she knew she ought to see the joke but couldn't. 'You damned, long-eyed, gloomy half-caste,⁵ you don't smell right,' he would say; and she never answered, not even to whisper, 'You don't smell right to me, either.'

The story went that once they had ventured to give a dinner party and that when the servant, Mildred, was bringing in coffee, he had pulled Mrs Sawyer's hair. 'Not a wig, you see,' he bawled. Even

then, if you can believe it, Mrs Sawyer had laughed and tried to pretend that it was all part of the joke, this mysterious, obscure, sacred English joke.

But Mildred told the other servants in the town that her eyes had gone wicked, like a souciant's⁶ eyes, and that afterwards she had picked up some of the hair he pulled out and put it in an envelope, and that Mr Sawyer ought to look out (hair is obeah⁷ as well as hands).

Of course, Mrs Sawyer had her compensations. They lived in a very pleasant house in Hill Street. The garden was large and they had a fine mango tree, which bore prolifically. The fruit was small, round, very sweet and juicy—a lovely, red-and-yellow colour when it was ripe. Perhaps it was one of the compensations, I used to think.

Mr Sawyer built a room on to the back of this house. It was unpainted inside and the wood smelt very sweet. Bookshelves lined the walls. Every time the Royal Mail steamer⁸ came in it brought a package for him, and gradually the empty shelves filled.

Once I went there with Eddie to borrow *The Arabian Nights*.⁹ That was on a Saturday afternoon, one of those hot, still afternoons when you felt that everything had gone to sleep, even the water in the gutters. But Mrs Sawyer was not asleep. She put her head in at the door and looked at us, and I knew that she hated the room and hated the books.

It was Eddie with the pale blue eyes and straw-coloured hair—the living image of his father, though often as silent as his mother—who first infected me with doubts about 'home', meaning England. He would be so quiet when others who had never seen it—none of us had ever seen it—were talking about its delights, gesticulating freely as we talked—London, the beautiful, rosy-cheeked ladies, the theatres, the shops, the fog, the blazing coal fires in winter, the exotic food (whitebait¹ eaten to the sound of violins), strawberries and cream—the word 'strawberries' always spoken with a guttural and throaty sound which we imagined to be the proper English pronunciation.

'I don't like strawberries,' Eddie said on one occasion.

'You *don't like* strawberries?'

'No, and I don't like daffodils either. Dad's always going on about them. He says they lick the flowers here into a cocked hat² and I bet that's a lie.'

We were all too shocked to say, 'You don't know a thing about it.' We were so shocked that nobody spoke to him for the rest of the day. But I for one admired him. I also was tired of learning and reciting poems in praise of daffodils, and my relations with the few 'real' English boys and girls I had met were awkward. I had discovered that if I called myself English they would snub me haughtily: 'You're not English; you're a horrid colonial.' 'Well, I don't much want to be English,' I would say. 'It's much more fun to be French or Spanish or something like that—and, as a matter of fact, I am a bit.' Then I was too killingly funny, quite ridiculous. Not only a horrid colonial, but also ridiculous. Heads I win, tails you lose—that was the English. I had thought about all this, and thought hard, but I had never dared to tell anybody what I thought and I realized that Eddie had been very bold.

But he was bold, and stronger than you would think. For one thing, he never felt the heat; some coldness in his fair skin resisted it. He didn't burn red or brown, he didn't freckle much.

Hot days seemed to make him feel especially energetic. 'Now we'll run twice round the lawn and then you can pretend you're dying of thirst in the desert and that I'm an Arab chieftain bringing you water.'

'You must drink slowly,' he would say, 'for if you're very thirsty and you drink quickly you die.'

So I learnt the voluptuousness of drinking slowly when you are very thirsty—small mouthful by small mouthful, until the glass of pink, iced Coca-Cola was empty.

Just after my twelfth birthday Mr Sawyer died suddenly, and as Eddie's special friend I went to the funeral, wearing a new white dress. My straight hair was damped with sugar and water the night

before and plaited into tight little plaits, so that it should be fluffy for the occasion.

When it was all over everybody said how nice Mrs Sawyer had looked, walking like a queen behind the coffin and crying her eyeballs out at the right moment, and wasn't Eddie a funny boy? He hadn't cried at all.

After this Eddie and I took possession of the room with the books. No one else ever entered it, except Mildred to sweep and dust in the mornings, and gradually the ghost of Mr Sawyer pulling Mrs Sawyer's hair faded, though this took a little time. The blinds were always halfway down and going in out of the sun was like stepping into a pool of brown-green water. It was empty except for the bookshelves, a desk with a green baize³ top and a wicker rocking-chair.

'My room,' Eddie called it. 'My books,' he would say, 'my books.'

I don't know how long this lasted. I don't know whether it was weeks after Mr Sawyer's death or months after, that I see myself and Eddie in the room. But there we are and there, unexpectedly, are Mrs Sawyer and Mildred. Mrs Sawyer's mouth tight, her eyes pleased. She is pulling all the books out of the shelves and piling them into two heaps. The big, fat glossy ones—the good-looking ones, Mildred explains in a whisper—lie in one heap. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *British Flowers*, *Birds and Beasts*, various histories, books with maps, Froude's *English in the West Indies*⁴ and so on—they are going to be sold. The unimportant books, with paper covers or damaged covers or torn pages, lie in another heap. They are going to be burnt—yes, burnt.

Mildred's expression was extraordinary as she said that—half hugely delighted, half shocked, even frightened. And as for Mrs Sawyer—well, I knew bad temper (I had often seen it), I knew rage, but this was hate. I recognized the difference at once and stared at her curiously. I edged closer to her so that I could see the titles of the books she was handling.

It was the poetry shelf. *Poems*, Lord Byron, *Poetical Works*, Milton, and so on. Vlung, vlung, vlung—all thrown into the heap that

were to be sold. But a book by Christina Rossetti, though also bound in leather, went into the heap that was to be burnt, and by a flicker in Mrs Sawyer's eyes I knew that worse than men who wrote books were women who wrote books—infinately worse. Men could be mercifully shot; women must be tortured.

Mrs Sawyer did not seem to notice that we were there, but she was breathing free and easy and her hands had got the rhythm of tearing and pitching. She looked beautiful, too—beautiful as the sky outside which was a very dark blue, or the mango tree, long sprays of brown and gold.

When Eddie said 'no', she did not even glance at him.

'No,' he said again in a high voice. 'Not that one. I was reading that one.'

She laughed and he rushed at her, his eyes starting out of his head, shrieking, 'Now I've got to hate you too. Now I hate you too.'

He snatched the book out of her hand and gave her a violent push. She fell into the rocking-chair.

Well, I wasn't going to be left out of all this, so I grabbed a book from the condemned pile and dived under Mildred's outstretched arm.

Then we were both in the garden. We ran along the path, bordered with crotons.⁵ We pelted down the path though they did not follow us and we could hear Mildred laughing—kyah, kyah, kyah, kyah. As I ran I put the book I had taken into the loose front of my brown holland dress. It felt warm and alive.

When we got into the street we walked sedately, for we feared the black children's ridicule. I felt very happy, because I had saved this book and it was my book and I would read it from the beginning to the triumphant words 'The End'. But I was uneasy when I thought of Mrs Sawyer.

'What will she do?' I said.

'Nothing,' Eddie said. 'Not to me.'

He was white as a ghost in his sailor suit, a blue-white even in the setting sun, and his father's sneer was clamped on his face.

'But she'll tell your mother all sorts of lies about you,' he said. 'She's an awful liar. She can't make up a story to save her life, but she makes up lies about people all right.'

'My mother won't take any notice of her,' I said. Though I was not at all sure.

'Why not? Because she's . . . because she isn't white?'

Well, I knew the answer to that one. Whenever the subject was brought up—people's relations and whether they had a drop of coloured blood or whether they hadn't—my father would grow impatient and interrupt. 'Who's white?' he would say. 'Damned few.'

So I said, 'Who's white? Damned few.'

'You can go to the devil,' Eddie said. 'She's prettier than your mother. When she's asleep her mouth smiles and she has your curling eyelashes and quantities and quantities and *quantities* of hair.'

'Yes,' I said truthfully. 'She's prettier than my mother.'

It was a red sunset that evening, a huge, sad, frightening sunset.

'Look, let's go back,' I said. 'If you're sure she won't be vexed with you, let's go back. It'll be dark soon.'

At his gate he asked me not to go. 'Don't go yet, don't go yet.'

We sat under the mango tree and I was holding his hand when he began to cry. Drops fell on my hand like the water from the dripstone in the filter⁶ in our yard. Then I began to cry too and when I felt my own tears on my hand I thought, 'Now perhaps we're married.'

'Yes, certainly, now we're married,' I thought. But I didn't say anything. I didn't say a thing until I was sure he had stopped. Then I asked, 'What's your book?'

'It's *Kim*,⁷ he said. 'But it got torn. It starts at page twenty now. What's the one you took?'

'I don't know, it's too dark to see,' I said.

When I got home I rushed into my bedroom and locked the door because I knew that this book was the most important thing that

had ever happened to me and I did not want anybody to be there when I looked at it.

But I was very disappointed, because it was in French and seemed dull. *Fort Comme La Mort*,⁸ it was called. . . .

1960

Endnotes

- Note 1: Wasting of the body associated with tuberculosis.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Or *Caribbees*: old term for the group of islands in the southeastern West Indies, now called the “Lesser Antilles.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, his pronunciation marks him as lower class.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Formerly British, Caribbean island off northeast Venezuela.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Offensive term for a person of mixed racial descent.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Female vampire, in Caribbean legend.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A charm or fetish used in Afro-Caribbean witchcraft or sorcery.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Ship, owned by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, that ferried mail from London to the West Indies beginning in 1841.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Also called *The Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of old stories, largely Persian, Arabian, and Indian in origin.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Young of a small fish, such as herring, considered a delicacy when cooked whole.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From *knocked into a cocked hat*: make them look terrible by comparison. Daffodils are common in English poetry, but do not grow in the West Indies.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Feltlike fabric.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Published in 1888 by the English historian James Anthony Froude (1818–1894).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tropical plants.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Dripstone is a sandstone used as a filter to clean water for household use.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Novel (1901) by the English writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), about an Irish orphan boy growing up in India.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Strong as Death*, 1889 novel by the French writer Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893).[Return to reference 8](#)

On Not Shooting Sitting Birds¹

There is no control over memory. Quite soon you find yourself being vague about an event which seemed so important at the time that you thought you'd never forget it. Or unable to recall the face of someone whom you could have sworn was there for ever. On the other hand, trivial and meaningless memories may stay with you for life. I can still shut my eyes and see Victoria grinding coffee on the pantry steps, the glass bookcase and the books in it, my father's pipe-rack, the leaves of the sandbox tree, the wallpaper of the bedroom in some shabby hotel, the hairdresser in Antibes.² It's in this way that I remember buying the pink milanese³ silk underclothes, the assistant who sold them to me and coming into the street holding the parcel.

I had started out in life trusting everyone and now I trusted no one. So I had few acquaintances and no close friends. It was perhaps in reaction against the inevitable loneliness of my life that I'd find myself doing bold, risky, even outrageous things without hesitation or surprise. I was usually disappointed in these adventures and they didn't have much effect on me, good or bad, but I never quite lost the hope of something better or different.

One day, I've forgotten now where, I met this young man who smiled at me and when we had talked a bit I agreed to have dinner with him in a couple of days' time. I went home excited, for I'd liked him very much, and began to plan what I should wear. I had a dress I quite liked, an evening cloak, shoes, stockings, but my underclothes weren't good enough for the occasion, I decided. Next day I went out and bought the milanese silk chemise⁴ and drawers.

So there we were seated at a table having dinner with a bedroom very obvious in the background. He was younger than I'd thought and stiffer and I didn't like him much after all. He kept eyeing me in such a wary, puzzled way. When we had finished our soup and the

waiter had taken the plates away, he said: 'But you're a lady, aren't you?' exactly as he might have said, 'But you're really a snake or a crocodile, aren't you?'

'Oh no, not that you'd notice,' I said, but this didn't work. We looked glumly at each other across the gulf that had yawned between us.

Before I came to England I'd read many English novels and I imagined I knew all about the thoughts and tastes of various sorts of English people. I quickly decided that to distract or interest this man I must talk about shooting.

I asked him if he knew the West Indies at all. He said no, he didn't and I told him a long story of having been lost in the Dominican forest when I was a child. This wasn't true. I'd often been in the woods but never alone. 'There are no parrots now,' I said, 'or very few. There used to be. There's a Dominican parrot in the zoo—have you ever seen it?—a sulky bird, very old I think. However, there are plenty of other birds and we do have shooting parties. Perdrix are very good to eat, but ramiers⁵ are rather bitter.'

Then I began describing a fictitious West Indian shooting party and all the time I talked I was remembering the real thing. An old shotgun leaning up in one corner of the room, the round table in the middle where we would sit to make cartridges, putting the shot in, ramming it down with a wad of paper. Gunpowder? There was that too, for I remember the smell. I suppose the boys were trusted to be careful.

The genuine shooting party consisted of my two brothers, who shared the shotgun, some hangers-on and me at the end of the procession, for then I couldn't bear to be left out of anything. As soon as the shooting was about to start I would stroll away casually and when I was out of sight run as hard as I could, crouch down behind a bush and put my fingers in my ears. It wasn't that I was sorry for the birds, but I hated and feared the noise of the gun. When it was all over I'd quietly join the others. I must have done this unobtrusively or probably my brothers thought me too

insignificant to worry about, for no one ever remarked on my odd behaviour or teased me about it.

On and on I went, almost believing what I was saying, when he interrupted me. 'Do you mean to say that your brothers shot sitting birds?' His voice was cold and shocked.

I stared at him. How could I convince this man that I hadn't the faintest idea whether my brothers shot sitting birds or not? How could I explain now what really happened? If I did he'd think me a liar. Also a coward and there he'd be right, for I was afraid of many things, not only the sound of gunfire. But by this time I wasn't sure that I liked him at all so I was silent and felt my face growing as stiff and unsmiling as his.

It was a most uncomfortable dinner. We both avoided looking at the bedroom and when the last mouthful was swallowed he announced that he was going to take me home. The way he said this rather puzzled me. Then I told myself that probably he was curious to see where I lived. Neither of us spoke in the taxi except to say, 'Well, goodnight.' 'Goodnight.'

I felt regretful when it came to taking off my lovely pink chemise, but I could still think: Some other night perhaps, another sort of man.

I slept at once.

1976

Endnotes

- Note 1: Game-bird hunters traditionally consider the shooting of sitting (rather than flying) birds shockingly unsportsmanlike.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Resort town on the south coast of France.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Made in Milan, Italy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Loose-fitting undergarment hanging straight from the shoulders.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Pigeons of the eastern Caribbean.[Return to reference 5](#)

CLAUDE MCKAY

1889–1948

Claude McKay was born into a farm-working family in Sunny Ville, Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, and spent the first half of his life on the British Caribbean island. His family belonged to the Black peasantry, a class descended from enslaved people who left the coastal plantations for the mountainous interior of the country. Family legend suggested that McKay's maternal ancestors hailed from Madagascar and his father's ancestors from the Ashanti region of modern-day Ghana. McKay grew up in a Christian family that valued education, but struggled within the racialized structure of Jamaican society, where White landowners and mixed-race peoples still made up the upper classes. At age sixteen McKay applied and was accepted to a trade school in Kingston. He never matriculated because the school was destroyed in the great earthquake of 1907. Instead McKay was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker and then a wheelwright and served for less than a year as a police constable. It was during this period that McKay met English linguist and folklorist Walter Jekyll, who encouraged his poetic aspirations and advised him to write in Jamaican dialect, or Creole. Drawing on the example of the Scottish-dialect poet Robert Burns, McKay harnessed the Jamaican idiom in poems collected in two books published in 1912, *Constab Ballads* and *Songs of Jamaica*. The latter collection includes "Old England," a seemingly reverent imaginative journey, in a new literary language, to the imperial "homeland," and "A Midnight

Woman to the Bobby," in which a sex worker humorously dresses down a young police officer who threatens to arrest her. The first major poet to make effective literary use of Jamaican English, McKay influenced many later African Caribbean poets who went further with vernacular forms of English, such as Louise Bennett.

For his poetry McKay won a prize that enabled him to travel to the United States and study at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute and at Kansas State College, before moving to Harlem in 1914. Switching in his poetry from Jamaican to Standardized English, he helped precipitate the Harlem Renaissance with his collection *Harlem Shadows* (1922), which included sonnets addressing the vexed racial experience of a Caribbean immigrant. "Outcast" gives voice to the Black diasporic experience of alienation from one's African origins and sometimes relies on primitive imagery to differentiate this lost world from the ills of modern civilization. McKay's sonnet "If We Must Die," written in response to the American anti-Black riots of the summer of 1919, offers a tragic and forceful expression of solidarity with African Americans. The poem has often been quoted as a rallying cry, without attribution, in other contexts.

For most of the 1920s and into the mid-1930s, McKay, identifying with the radical left, lived and wrote novels and short stories mainly in England, France, and Morocco. From his first novel, *Home to Harlem* (1928), onward, McKay took an interest in the Black underclasses and adopted an experimental approach to plot that mirrored the experiences of his wandering vagabond protagonists. McKay's alter-ego in *Home to Harlem* and its sequel, *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (1929), is a Haitian immigrant named Ray who has read James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, and all of D. H. Lawrence and wonders "if there was not a great Lawrence reservoir of words too terrible and too terrifying for nice printing." McKay's sympathy for the down-and-out and his willingness to delve into the recesses of desire brought him into tension with Black middle-class values and respectability politics. *Banjo* takes Ray to the "Ditch," where he meets the eponymous Banjo, an African American musician and a hard-drinking, pleasure-loving drifter who dreams of starting an

orchestra but refuses to play for money. The novel unfolds through a series of loosely related vignettes that blend bawdy scenes with lively debate about racial injustice, the plight of Black peoples across various nations, and international socialist politics.

"Jelly Roll" exemplifies the pulsating prose and exuberant refusal of decorum in *Banjo*. Set in the Café African, it intermingles the lyrics of "Shake That Thing" (a popular song by American blues musician Papa Charlie Jackson) with vivid descriptions of dancing, flirting, and "jazzing." McKay also intermingles characters from around the Black world, and he precisely catalogs the countries and skin colors of various clubgoers. Such a strategy is typical of McKay, for it allows him to address variation and division within the African diasporic community even as he stages a coming together of Black peoples. He complicates what it means to be "Black" and takes apart unified racial identities while nonetheless acknowledging commonly shared forms of oppression and loss. Making music of narrative and narrative of music, McKay courts the improvisatory, sensuous, and sometimes reckless stylings of jazz to offer a vision of life at the margins.

McKay would go on to publish several more major works: *Gingertown* (1932), *Banana Bottom* (1933), and his autobiography, *A Long Way from Home* (1937). He returned to the United States in 1934, but struggled financially and emotionally. He converted to Catholicism toward the end of his life and died in Chicago of congestive heart failure. He was in search of a publisher for his second autobiographical work, *My Green Hills of Jamaica*, when he died. It was published posthumously in 1979 as were two more novels, *Amiable with Big Teeth* (2017) and *Romance in Marseilles* (2020), the latter of which featured openly gay characters and was judged too controversial to be published in its own time.

A Midnight Woman to the Bobby¹

No palm me up,² you dutty brute,
You' jam mout' mash³ like ripe bread-fruit;
You fas'n now, but wait lee ya,⁴
I'll see you grunt under de law.

5 You t'ink you wise, but we wi' see;
You not de fus' one fas' wid me;
I'll lib fe see dem tu'n you out,
As sure as you got dat mash' mout'.

10 I born right do'n beneat' de clack⁵
(You ugly brute, you tu'n you' back?)
Don't t'ink dat I'm a come-aroun',⁶
I born right 'way in 'panish Town.⁷

15 Care how you try, you caan' do mo'
Dan many dat was hyah befo';
Yet whe' dey all o' dem te-day?
De buccra⁸ dem no kick dem 'way?

20 Ko 'pon you' jam samplatta⁹ nose:
'Cos you wear Mis'r Koshaw clo'es.¹
You t'ink say you's de only man,²
Yet fus' time ko how you be'n 'tan'.³

You big an' ugly ole tu'n-foot⁴
Be'n neber know fe wear a boot;
An' chigger nyam you' tumpa toe,⁵
Till nit full i' like herrin' roe.⁶

25 You come from mountain naked-'kin,⁷
 An' Lard a mussy! you be'n thin,
 For all de bread-fruit dem be'n done,
 Bein' 'poil' up by de tearin' sun:

 30 De coco⁸ couldn' bear at all,
 For, Lard! de groun' was pure white-marl;⁹
 An' t'rough de rain part o' de year
 De mango tree dem couldn' bear.

 35 An' when de pinch o' time you feel
 A 'pur you a you' chigger heel,¹
 You lef' you' district, big an' coarse,
 An' come join buccra Police Force.

 40 An' now you don't wait fe you' glass,²
 But trouble me wid you' jam fas';³
 But wait, me frien', you' day wi' come,
 I'll see you go same lak a some.⁴

 Say wha'?—'res' me?⁵—you go to hell!
 You t'ink Judge don't know unno⁶ well?
 You t'ink him gwin' go sentance me
 Widout a soul fe witness i'?

1912

Endnotes

- Note 1: Police constable. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Don't put your hands on me (Jamaican English); the entire poem is in Jamaican English: the notes present standardized translations of dialect. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Your damn mouth is all awry. [Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: You are fast (meddling) now, but wait a little, do you hear?[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The clock on the public buildings at Spanish Town.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Day-laborer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: City in central Jamaica. Spanish Town was the capital of British Jamaica from 1692–1872.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: White man.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Refers to a piece of leather tied like a sandal to the foot. “Ko”: look.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Police uniform. Colonel Kershaw was inspector general of police in 1911 when the poem was written.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A fine fellow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Yet when I first knew you, see how you looked.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Turned-in foot.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: And chiggers had eaten into your maimed toe.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Herring fish eggs.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: With holes in your clothing.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Edible root.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Earthy deposit rich in calcium carbonate.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: When you felt hard times spur you in your chigger-eaten heel.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The right moment.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Meddling and officiousness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Same like some; just like others before you did.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Arrest me?[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: You.[Return to reference 6](#)

Old England

I've longin' in me dept's of heart dat I can conquer
not,
'Tis a wish dat I've been havin' from since I could
form a t'o't,⁰
'Tis to sail athwart the ocean an' to hear de billows
roar,
When dem ride aroun' de steamer,¹ when dem beat
on England's shore.

5 Just to view de homeland England, in de streets of
London walk,
An' to see de famous sights dem 'bouten which
dere's so much talk,
An' to watch de fact'ry chimneys pourin' smoke up to
de sky,
An' to see de matches-children, dat I hear 'bout,
passin' by.²

10 I would see Saint Paul's Cathedral,³ an' would hear
some of de great
Learnin' comin' from de bishops, preachin' relics of
old fait';
I would ope me mout' wid wonder at de massive
organ soun',
An' would 'train me eyes to see de beauty lyin' all
aroun'.

I'd go to de City Temple,⁴ where de old fait' is a
wreck,
An' de parson is a-preachin' views dat most folks will
not tek;

15 I'd go where de men of science meet togeder in deir
hall,
To give light unto de real truths, to obey king
Reason's call.

I would view Westminster Abbey,⁵ where de great of
England sleep,
An' de solemn marble statues o'er deir ashes vigil
keep;
I would see immortal Milton an' de wul'-famous
Shakespeare,
20 Past'ral Wordsworth', gentle Gray,⁶ an' all de great
souls buried dere.

I would see de ancient chair where England's kings
deir crowns put on,
Soon to lay dem by again when all de vanity is done;
An' I'd go to view de lone spot where in peaceful
solitude
Rests de body of our Missis Queen,⁷ Victoria de
Good.

25 An' dese places dat I sing of now shall afterwards
impart
All deir solemn sacred beauty to a weary searchin'
heart;
So I'll rest glad an' contented in me min'^o for
evermore,
When I sail across de ocean back to my own native
shore.

1912

Endnotes

- Note 1: Steamship.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: See the short story “The Little-Match Seller,” by the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), and the poem “The Little Match Girl,” by the Scottish writer William McGonagall (1830?–1902), both about a poor match-selling girl who freezes to death on New Year’s Eve.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In London, cathedral of the Anglican bishop.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Victorian church in central London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: London church where monarchs are crowned and the famous, including poets, are buried.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Thomas Gray (1716–1771), English poet and author of “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.”[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: So called in Jamaica, Victoria reigned during the emancipation of slaves in 1837.[Return to reference 7](#)

Notes

- °: *thought*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *mind*[Return to reference °](#)

If We Must Die

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
5 If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
10 Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

1919, 1922

Outcast

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
My spirit, bondaged by the body, longs.
Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs.
5 I would go back to darkness and to peace,
But the great western world holds me in fee,
And I may never hope for full release
While to its alien gods I bend my knee.
Something in me is lost, forever lost,
10 Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
And I must walk the way of life a ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart;
For I was born, far from my native clime,
Under the white man's menace, out of time.

1922

From Banjo: A Story without a Plot

V. "Jelly Roll"

Shake That Thing. The opening of the Café African by a Senegalese had brought all the joy-lovers of darkest color together to shake that thing. Never was there such a big black-throated guzzling of red wine, white wine, and close, indiscriminate jazzing¹ of all the Negroes of Marseilles.

For the Negro-Negroid² population of the town divides sharply into groups. The Martiniquans and Guadeloupans,³ regarding themselves as constituting the dark flower of all Marianne's blacks, make a little aristocracy of themselves. The Madagascans with their cousins from the little dots of islands around their big island and the North African Negroes, whom the pure Arabs despise, fall somewhere between the Martiniquans and the Senegalese,⁴ who are the savages. Senegalese is the geographically inaccurate term generally used to designate all the Negroes from the different parts of French West Africa.

The magic thing had brought all shades and grades of Negroes together. Money. A Senegalese had emigrated to the United States, and after some years had returned with a few thousand dollars. And he had bought a café on the quay. It was a big café, the first that any Negro in the town ever owned.

The tiny group of handsomely-clothed Senegalese were politely proud of the bar, and all the blue overall boys of the docks and the ships were boisterously glad of a spacious place to spread joy in.

All shades of Negroes came together there. Even the mulattoes⁵ took a step down from their perch to mix in. For, as in the British West Indies⁶ and South Africa, the mulattoes of the French colonies do not usually intermingle with the blacks.

But the magic had brought them all together to shake that thing and drink red wine, white wine, sweet wine. All the British West African blacks, Portuguese blacks,⁷ American blacks, all who had drifted into this port that the world goes through.

A great event! And to Banjo it had brought a unique feeling of satisfaction. He did not miss it, as he never missed anything rich that came within his line of living. There was music at the bar and Banjo made much of it. He got a little acquainted with the *patron*, who often chatted with him. The *patron* was proud of his English and liked to display it when there was any distinguished-appearing person at the café.

"Shake That Thing!" That was the version of the "Jelly-Roll Blues"⁸ that Banjo loved and always played. And the Senegalese boys loved to shake to it. Banjo was treated to plenty of red wine and white wine when he played that tune. And he would not think of collecting sous.⁹ Latnah had gone about once and collected sous in her tiny jade tray. But she never went again. She loved Banjo, but she could not enter into the spirit of that all-Negro-atmosphere of the bar. Banjo was glad she stayed away. He did not want to collect sous from a crowd of fellows just like himself. He preferred to play for them and be treated to wine. Sous! How could he respect sous? He who had burnt up dollars. Why should he care, with a free bed, free love, and wine?

His plan of an orchestra filled his imagination now. Maybe he could use the Café African as a base to get some fellows together. Maltby could play the guitar right splendid, but he had no instrument. If that Senegalese *patron* had a little imagination, he might buy Maltby a guitar and they would start a little orchestra that would make the bar unique and popular.

Many big things started in just such a little way. Only give him a chance and he would make this dump sit up and take notice—show it how to be sporty and game. How he would love to see a couple of brown chippies from Gawd's own show this Ditch¹ some decent movement—turn themselves jazzing loose in a back-home, brown-

skin Harlem way. Oh, Banjo's skin was itching to make some romantic thing.

And one afternoon he walked straight into a dream—a cargo boat with a crew of four music-making colored boys, with banjo, ukelele, mandolin, guitar, and horn. That evening Banjo and Malt, mad with enthusiasm, literally carried the little band to the Vieux Port.² It was the biggest evening ever at the Senegalese bar. They played several lively popular tunes, but the Senegalese boys yelled for "Shake That Thing." Banjo picked it off and the boys from the boat quickly got it. Then Banjo keyed himself up and began playing in his own wonderful wild way.

"Old Uncle Jack, the jelly-roll king,
Just got back from shaking that thing!
He can shake that thing, he can shake that thing
For he's a jelly-roll king. Oh, shake that thing!"

It roused an Arab-black girl from Algeria³ into a shaking-mad mood. And she jazzed right out into the center of the floor and shook herself in a low-down African shimmying way. The mandolin player, a stocky, cocky lad of brown-paper complexion, the lightest-skinned of the playing boys, had his eyes glued on her. Her hair was cropped and stood up shiny, crinkly like a curiously-wrought bird's nest. She was big-boned and well-fleshed and her full lips were a savage challenge. Oh, shake that thing!

"*Cointreau!*"⁴ The Negroid girl called when, the music ceasing, the paper-brown boy asked her to take a drink.

"That yaller⁵ nigger's sure gone on her," Malt said to Banjo.

"And she knows he's got a roll can reach right up to her figure," said Banjo. "Looka them eyes she shines on him! Oh, boy! it was the same for you and I when we first landed—every kind of eyes in the chippies' world shining for us!"

"Yes, but you ain't got nothing to kick about. The goodest eyes in this burg⁶ ain't shining for anybody else but you."

"Hheh-hheh," Banjo giggled. "I'll be dawggone, Malt, ef I don't think sometimes youse getting soft. Takem as they come, easy and jolly, ole boh."

He poured out a glass of red wine, chinked his glass against Malt's, and toasted, "Oh, you Dixieland,⁷ here's praying for you' soul salvation."

"And here is joining you," said Malt.

"Dry land will nevah be my land,
Gimme a wet wide-open land for mine."

Handsome, happy brutes. The music is on again. The Senegalese boys crowd the floor, dancing with one another. They dance better male with male or individually, than with the girls, putting more power in their feet, dancing more wildly, more natively, more savagely. Senegalese in blue overalls, Madagascan soldiers in khaki, dancing together. A Martiniquan with his mulattress flashing her gold teeth. A Senegalese sergeant goes round with his fair blonde. A Congo boxer struts it with his Marguerite.⁸ And Banjo, grinning, singing, white teeth, great mouth, leads the band. . . . Shake that thing.

The banjo⁹ dominates the other instruments; the charming, pretty sound of the ukelele, the filigree notes of the mandolin, the sensuous color of the guitar. And Banjo's face shows that he feels that his instrument is first. The Negroes and Spanish Negroids¹ of the evenly-warm, ever-green and ever-flowering Antilles may love the rich chords of the guitar, but the banjo is preëminently the musical instrument of the American Negro. The sharp, noisy notes of the banjo belong to the American Negro's loud music of life—an affirmation of his hardy existence in the midst of the biggest, the most tumultuous civilization of modern life.

Sing, Banjo! Play, Banjo! Here I is, Big Boss, keeping step, sure step, right long with you in some sort a ways. He-ho, Banjo! Play that thing! Shake that thing!

“Old Brother Mose² is sick in bed.
Doctor says he is almost dead
From shaking that thing, shaking that thing.
He was a jelly-roll king. Oh, shake that thing!”

A little flock of pinks³ from the Ditch floated into the bar. Seamen from Senegal. Soldiers from Madagascar. Pimps from Martinique. Pimps from everywhere. Pimps from Africa. Seamen fed up with the sea. Young men weary of the work of the docks, scornful of the meager reward—doing that now. Black youth close to the bush and the roots of jungle trees, trying to live the precarious life of the poisonous orchids of civilization.

Shake That Thing! . . .

The slim, slate-colored Martiniquan dances with a gold-brown Arab girl in a purely sensual way. His dog’s mouth shows a tiny, protruding bit of pink tongue. Oh, he jazes like a lizard with his girl. A dark-brown lizard and a gold-brown lizard. . . .

“Oh, shake that thing,
He’s a jelly-roll king.”

A coffee-black boy from Cameroon and a chocolate-brown from Dakar⁴ stand up to each other to dance a native sex-symbol dance. Bending knee and nodding head, they dance up to each other. As they almost touch, the smaller boy spins suddenly round and dances away. Oh, exquisite movement! Like a ram goat and a ram kid. Hands and feet! Shake that thing!

Black skin itching, black flesh warm with the wine of life, the music of life, the love and deep meaning of life. Strong smell of healthy black bodies in a close atmosphere, generating sweat and waves of heat. Oh, shake that thing!

Suddenly in the thick joy of it there was a roar and a rush and sheering apart as a Senegalese leaped like a leopard bounding through the jazzers, and, gripping an antagonist, butted him clean

on the forehead once, twice, and again, and turned him loose to fall heavily on the floor like a felled tree.

The *patron* dashed from behind the bar. A babel⁵ of different dialects broke forth. Policemen appeared and the musicians slipped outside, followed by most of the Martiniquans.

"Hheh-hheh," Banjo laughed. "The music so good it put them French fellahs in a fighting mood."

"Niggers is niggers all ovah the wul'," said the tall, long-faced chocolate who played the guitar. "Always spoil a good thing. Always the same no matter what color their hide is or what langwidge they talk."

"And I was fixing for that fair brown. I wonder where at she is?" said the mandolin-player.

"Don't worry," said Banjo. "Theah's always some'n' better or as good as what you miss. You should do like me whenever you hit a new port. Always try to make something as different from what you know as a Leghorn is from a Plymouth Rock."⁶

"Hi-ee! But youse one chicken-knowing fool," said Maltz.

Banjo did a little strut-jig. "You got mah number all right, boh. And what wese gwine to do now? The night ain't begin yet at all foh mine. I want to do some moh playing and do some moh wine and what not do?"

A Martinique guide, who had had them under surveillance for a long while, now stepped up and said that he knew of a love shop where they could play music and have some real fun.

"You sure?" asked Banjo. "Don't fool us now, for I lives right down here in this dump and know most a them. And if that joint you know ain't a place that we can lay around in for a while, nothing doing I tell you straight. I'll just take all mah buddies right outa there."

The guide assured the boys that his place was all right. They all went into another bar on the quay and the guitar-player paid for a round of drinks. From there they turned up the Rue de la Mairie and west along the Rue de la Loge to find the Martiniquan's rendezvous.

They went by the Rue de la Reynarde, where a loud jarring cluster of colored lights was shouting its trade. Standing in the slimy litter of a narrow turning, an emaciated, middle-aged, watery-eyed woman was doing a sort of dance and singing in a thin streaky voice. She was advertising the house in whose shadow she danced, and was much like a poorly-feathered hen pecking and clucking on a dunghill.

The boys hesitated a little before the appearance of the drab-fronted building that their escort indicated. Then they entered and were surprised at finding themselves in a showy love shop of methodically assorted things. It was very international. European, African, Asiatic. Contemporary feminine styles competed with old and forgotten. Rose-petal pajamas, knee-length frocks, silken shifts, the nude, the boyish bob contrasted with shimmering princess gowns, country-girl dresses of striking freshness, severe glove-fitting black setting off a demure lady with Italian-rich, thick, long hair, the piquant semi-nude and Spanish-shawled shoulders.

Banjo saw his first flame of the Ditch between two sailors with batik-like kerchiefs curiously knotted on their heads. They were Malay,⁷ perhaps. This time he was not aroused. The Martiniquan talked to a strangely attractive girl. She had almond eyes that were painted in a unique manner to emphasize their exotic effect. Evidently she was not pure Mongolian,⁸ but perhaps some casual crossing of Occident and Orient, commerce-spanned, dropped on the shore of the wonderful sea of the world.

There were half a dozen touts.⁹ One seemed a person of authority in the place. He was this side of forty, above average height, of meager form, Spanish type, with a face rather disgusting, because, although dark, it was sallow and deep-sunken under the cheek bones. He wore a blue suit, white scarf, heavy gold chain, and patent-leather shoes. The other five were youths. Three sported bright suits and fancy shoes of two and three colors, and two were in ordinary proletarian blue. The proletarian suits among all the striking feminine finery gave a certain elusive tone of distinction to the atmosphere, and one dressed thus was particularly conspicuous,

reclining on a red-cushioned seat, under the lavish and intimate caresses of a Negress from the Antilles.¹ Her face was like that of a Pekinese.² She wore a bit of orange chiffon and had a green fan, which she opened at intervals against her mouth as she grinned deliciously.

Sitting like a queen in prim fatness, quite high up against a desk near the staircase that led to the regions above, a lady ruled over the scene with smiling business efficiency. When the Martiniquan spoke to her, introducing his evening's catch by a wave of the hand toward where the boys had seated themselves, and explaining that they wanted to play their own music, she smiled a gay acquiescence.

"Oh, shake, shake, shake that thing!"
He's a jelly-roll king. . . ."

When Banjo and his fellows entered, many eyes had followed them. And now as they played and hummed and swayed, all eyes were fixed on them, and soon the whole shop was right out on the floor, shaking that thing. Oh, shake that thing!

The little black girl was all in a wild heat of movement as she went rearing up and down with her young Provençal.³ But he seemed unequal to catch and keep up with her motion, so she exchanged him for the Martiniquan, who went prancing into it. And round and round they went, bounding in and out among the jazzers, rearing and riding together with the speed and freedom of two wild goats. Oh, shake that wonderful thing!

The players paused and some girls tried to order champagne on them, but the Martiniquan intervened and demanded wine and spirits.

"He knows his business," the mandolin-player said to Banjo.

"He's gotta," Banjo replied, "because he's got himself to look out for and me to reckon with."

Suddenly the air was full of a terrible tenseness and gravity as an altercation between the lady at the desk and the meager, sallow-faced man seemed at the point of developing into a fateful affair.

The man was leaning against the desk, looking into the woman's face with cold, ghastly earnestness, his hand resting a little in his hip pocket. The woman's face fell flat like paste and all the girls stood tiptoe in silence and trembling excitement. Abruptly, without a word, the man turned and left the room with murder in his stride.

"That must be the boss-man," the mandolin-player said.

"And he looks like a mean mastiff,"⁴ said the guitar-player.

"Sure seems lak he's just that thing," agreed Banjo.

Tem, tem, ti-tum, tim ti-tim, tum, tem. Banjo and the boys were chording up. Back . . . thing . . . bed . . . black . . . dead. . . Oh, shake that thing. . . Jelly-r-o-o-o-o-oll! Again all the shop was out on the floor. No graceful sliding and gliding, but strutting, jigging, shimmying, shuffling, humping, standing-swaying, dogging, doing, shaking that thing. The girls were now tiptoeing to another kind of excitement. Blood had crept back up into the face of the woman at the desk. . . .

The sallow-faced man appeared in the entrance and strode through the midst of it to the desk. Bomb! The fearful report snuffed out the revel and the dame tumbled fatly to the floor. The murderer gloated over the sad mess of flesh for an instant, then with a wild leap he lanced himself like a rat through the paralyzed revelers and disappeared.

The bewildered music-makers halted hesitantly at the foot of the alley.

"Let's all go in here and take a stiff drink." Banjo indicated a little bistro at the corner.

"Better let's leg it a li'l' ways longer," said the ukelele-player, "so the police won't come fooling around us now that wese good and well away outa there. I don't wanta have no truck with the police."

"And they ain't gwineta mess around us, pardner," said Malt. "We don't speak that there lingo a theirn and they ain't studying us. Ise been in on a dozen shooting-ups in this here Ditch, ef Ise been in on one, with the bullets them jest burning pass mah black buttum, and Ise nevah been asked by the police, 'What did you miss?' nor 'What did you see?' "

"Did you say a dozen?" cried the ukelele-player.

"Just that I did, boh, which was what I was pussonally attached to. But that ain't nothing at all, for theah's a shooting-up or a cutting-up—and sometimes moh—every day in this here burg."

"Malty," said Banjo, "vouse sure one eggsigirating spade."⁵

"Doughnuts on that there eggsigirating. It's the same crap to me whether there was a dozen or a thousand. They ain't nevah made a hole in me, for Ise got magic in mah skin foh protection, when you done got you souvenir there on you' wrist, Banjo boy."

"Gawd! But it was a bloody affair, all right," said the guitar-player. "I was so frightened I didn't really know what was happening. Bam! Biff! And the big boss-lady was undertaker's business before you could squint."

"Jest spoiled the whole sport," said the ukelele-player. "I kinda liked the nifty dump. It was the goods, all right."

"You said it, boh," the mandolin-player grinned, scratching his person. "It was some moh collection. All the same, I gotta plug."

"With you, buddy," cried Banjo. "Right there with you I sure indeed is."

"Let's go back to the African Bar," suggested the mandolin-player. The picture of the North African girl shaking that jelly-roll thing was still warmly working in his blood.

They found the African Bar closed. Again they left the quay⁶ and Banjo took them up one of the somber, rubbish-strewn alleys of the Ditch. On both sides of the alley were the dingy cubicles whose only lights were the occupants who filled the fronts, gesturing and calling in ludicrous tones: "Viens ici, viens ici,"⁷ and repeating pridefully the raw expressions of the low love shops that they had learned from English-speaking seamen.

Out of a drinking hole-in-the-wall came the creaky jangling notes of a small, upright and ancient pianola.⁸ The place was chock-full of a mixed crowd of girls, seamen, and dockers, with two man-of-war⁹ sailors and three soldiers among them.

"What about this here dump?" asked Banjo.

The mandolin-player looked lustfully up and down the alley and into the bistro, where wreaths of smoke settled heavily upon the frowsy air. "Suits me all right," he drawled. "What about you fellows?"

"Well, I hope it won't turn into another bloody mess of a riot this time," said the ukelele-player.

"Here youse just like you would be at home. This is *my* street," said Banjo. A girl came up and, patting him on the shoulder with a familiar phrase, she pushed him into the bistro.

As they entered a Senegalese who had been dancing to their voluptuous playing at the African Bar, exclaimed: "Here they are! Now we're going to hear some real music—something ravishing." And he begged Banjo to play the "Jelly-Roll."

One of the soldiers was evidently "slumming." There was a neat elegance about his uniform and shoes that set him apart from the ambiguous dandies of military service, the *habitués*¹ of shady places. His features and his manner betrayed class distinction. He offered Banjo and his companions a round of drinks, saying in slow English: "Please play. You American? I like much *les Negres* play the jazz American. I hear them in Paris. *Epatant!*"²

Banjo grinned and tossed off his Cap Corse.³ "All right, fellows. Let's play them that thing first."

"And then the once-over," said the mandolin-player.

Shake That Thing! That jelly-roll Thing!

Shake to the loud music of life playing to the primeval round of life. Rough rhythm of darkly-carnal life. Strong surging flux of profound currents forced into shallow channels. Play that thing! One movement of the thousand movements of the eternal life-flow. Shake that thing! In the face of the shadow of Death. Treacherous hand of murderous Death, lurking in sinister alleys, where the shadows of life dance, nevertheless, to their music of life. Death over there! Life over here! Shake down Death and forget his commerce, his purpose, his haunting presence in a great shaking orgy. Dance down the Death of these days, the Death of these ways in shaking that thing. Jungle jazzing, Orient wriggling, civilized

stepping. Shake that thing! Sweet dancing thing of primitive joy, perverse pleasure, prostitute ways, many-colored variations of the rhythm, savage, barbaric, refined—eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical, magnificent—the dance divine of life. . . . Oh, Shake That Thing!

1929

Endnotes

- Note 1: Playing and/or dancing to jazz music. It can also mean to thrill, intoxicate, or agitate.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Offensive and now obsolete racial grouping for Indigenous Africans.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Inhabitants or natives of Guadeloupe, an archipelago in the Caribbean and territory of France. “Martiniquais”: inhabitants or natives of Martinique, an island in the Caribbean and territory of France.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Inhabitants or natives of Senegal, a West African country. “North African”: from the North African region of Africa, including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt. “Madagascans”: inhabitants or natives of Madagascar, an island off the coast of Africa and formally part of the French colonial empire.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Offensive and dated term for people of mixed-race ancestry, particularly of White and Black ancestry.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The former name for the colonial territories of the United Kingdom in the Caribbean, before many became independent countries.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Portuguese African colonies included Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. “British West African”: inhabitant or native of British West Africa, a former name for the colonies of the United Kingdom in West Africa, before they became independent countries.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Jazz fox-trot composed by American musician Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe (stage name: Jelly Roll Morton) in 1924.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A small amount of money.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A run-down but lively area frequented by Black residents and transients in the city of Marseille, France. "Chippies": dated and derogatory term for prostitutes or promiscuous women.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Literally "old port" (French); a harbor in the city of Marseille, France.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Country in North Africa.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An orange-flavored liqueur.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pronunciation spelling of *yellow* (outdated slang referring to a light-skinned Black person).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A town or city.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Style of jazz music developed in New Orleans in the early 20th century.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A typically French name that may imply an interracial relationship between the boxer and a White French woman. "Congo": an inhabitant or native of the Congo, a country in central Africa.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A stringed musical instrument originally created by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and North America. Its construction and sounds drew on enslaved people's memories of African musical traditions, and the instrument is foundational to both African American and American folk culture.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Dated and offensive racial grouping for Black people living in or from Spain.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Possibly a reference to the play *Meek Mose* (1928) by Frank Wilson. Its protagonist is a Black preacher who believes the meek will inherit the earth. It was one of the first plays by an African American author to be staged on Broadway, and it was restaged by the Federal Theater in 1934 under the title *Brother Mose*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Possibly slang for sex workers.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Capital and largest city of Senegal. "Cameroon": country in West-central Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Reference to the Tower of Babel, a biblical myth explaining the origin of different languages. Humans sharing a common language attempted to build a tower tall enough to reach heaven, leading God to scatter the people and disrupt their ability to understand one another.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Location in Massachusetts, United States, where the *Mayflower* carrying pilgrims from England landed in 1620. "Leghorn": an Italian port city.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Inhabitant or native of Malaysia.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Inhabitant or native of Mongolia.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: People soliciting business.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: An archipelago in the Caribbean. "Negress": dated and offensive term for a woman or girl of Black African ancestry.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An inhabitant or native of Peking, a former English name for Beijing.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An inhabitant or native of Provence, a region of France.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A large breed of dog.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An offensive term for a Black person. "Eggsigirating": pronunciation spelling of "exaggerating."[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Platform alongside water used for a landing place and loading or unloading ships.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: "Come here" (French).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Also known as a "player piano," a mechanical self-playing piano.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A powerful warship.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Regular visitors (French).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: "Amazing" (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A kind of aperitif wine.[Return to reference 3](#)

STEVIE SMITH

1902–1971

Stevie Smith's real name was Florence Margaret Smith, but she was nicknamed "Stevie" after a famous jockey because of her small stature. She was born in Hull, Yorkshire, but at the age of three went with her mother and sister to live with an aunt in Palmer's Green, a suburb north of London. She worked as a secretary at the magazine-publishing firm of Newnes, Pearson, while continuing to live with her aunt, to whom she was devoted. When her aunt grew old and infirm, Smith gave up her job to look after her, although she herself was often in ill health. At the same time, she managed to lead a lively social life in London and was known for the vividness and range of her conversation.

Smith brought out her first novel, *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936), at the suggestion of a publisher who rejected a collection of poems. This was followed by her first volume of poetry, *A Good Time Was Had by All* (1937), and in due course by eight further poetry collections and two more novels.

Smith's work is utterly original, fitting into no category and showing none of the characteristic influences of the age. Her poetry sometimes seems to be light verse, and it draws on nursery rhyme and often employs simple language, but its humor can shade into dread, its whimsy into metaphysical pondering. She illustrated many of her poems with line drawings (she called them "doodles") that reinforce the effect of mock-naïveté. This stance is akin to the

cunning innocence of the fool or the trickster, and can be seen, in part, as a gendered deflection and subversion of masculine cultural norms. Her diction ranges from the matter-of-fact to the archaic, from colloquialism ("Poor chap"), slang ("you ass"), and nonsense ("Our Bog Is Dood") to didacticism ("My point which upon this has been obscured") and foreign phrases ("Sunt Leones"). Her verse moves from free conversational rhythms to traditional verse patterns, on occasion becoming—to ironic effect—almost doggerel. Her tone can be satiric, solemn, or both at once. A poem such as "Not Waving but Drowning" belies the apparent guilelessness of Smith's art. Like the dying man's ambiguous gesture here, her poetry waves to us, with its songlike lyricism and comedy, and yet also reveals much about "drowning"—about death, suicide, and other painful human issues. A religious skeptic, Smith said she was always in danger of falling into belief, and her poetry shows her to be fascinated by theological speculation, the language of the Bible, and religious experience.

Sunt Leones¹

The lions who ate the Christians on the sands of the
arena
By indulging native appetites played what has now
been seen a
Not entirely negligible part
In consolidating at the very start
The position of the Early Christian Church.
5 Initiatory rites are always bloody
And the lions, it appears
From contemporary art, made a study
Of dyeing Coliseum sands a ruddy
Liturgically sacrificial hue
10 And if the Christians felt a little blue—
Well people being eaten often do.
Theirs was the death, and theirs the crown undying,²
A state of things which must be satisfying.
My point which up to this has been obscured
15 Is that it was the lions who procured
By chewing up blood gristle flesh and bone
The martyrdoms on which the Church has grown.
I only write this poem because I thought it rather
looked
20 As if the part the lions played was being overlooked.
By lions' jaws great benefits and blessings were
begotten
And so our debt to Lionhood must never be
forgotten.

1937

Endnotes

- Note 1: There be lions (Latin). Christians were attacked and eaten by lions in the public games held in the Colosseum during the Roman Empire.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, of martyrdom, in heaven. The Christian liturgy, or system of worship, prescribes certain colors for certain festivals (line 10).[Return to reference 2](#)

Our Bog Is Dood

Our Bog is dood, our Bog is dood,
They lisped in accents mild,
But when I asked them to explain
They grew a little wild.
5 How do you know your Bog is dood
My darling little child?

We know because we wish it so
That is enough, they cried,
And straight within each infant eye
10 Stood up the flame of pride,
And if you do not think it so
You shall be crucified.

Then tell me, darling little ones,
What's dood, suppose Bog is?
15 Just what we think, the answer came,
Just what we think it is.
They bowed their heads. Our Bog is ours
And we are wholly his.

But when they raised them up again
20 They had forgotten me
Each one upon each other glared
In pride and misery
For what was dood, and what their Bog
They never could agree.

25 Oh sweet it was to leave them then,
And sweeter not to see,
And sweetest of all to walk alone

Beside the encroaching sea,
The sea that soon should drown them all,
That never yet drowned me.

Not Waving but Drowning

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

5 Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave
way,
They said.

10 Oh, no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

1957



Thoughts About the Person from Porlock¹

Coleridge received the Person from Porlock
And ever after called him a curse,
Then why did he hurry to let him in?
He could have hid in the house.

5 It was not right of Coleridge in fact it was wrong
(But often we all do wrong)
As the truth is I think he was already stuck
With Kubla Khan.

10 He was weeping and wailing: I am finished, finished,
I shall never write another word of it,
When along comes the Person from Porlock
And takes the blame for it.

It was not right, it was wrong,
But often we all do wrong.

• • •

15 May we inquire the name of the Person from
Porlock?
Why, Porson, didn't you know?
He lived at the bottom of Porlock Hill
So had a long way to go,

20 He wasn't much in the social sense
Though his grandmother was a Warlock,
One of the Rutlandshire ones I fancy
And nothing to do with Porlock.

And he lived at the bottom of the hill as I said
And had a cat named Flo,
And had a cat named Flo.

25

I long for the Person from Porlock
To bring my thoughts to an end,
I am becoming impatient to see him
I think of him as a friend,

30

Often I look out of the window
Often I run to the gate
I think, He will come this evening,
I think it is rather late.

35

I am hungry to be interrupted
Forever and ever amen
O Person from Porlock come quickly
And bring my thoughts to an end.

• • •

40

I felicitate the people who have a Person from
Porlock
To break up everything and throw it away
Because then there will be nothing to keep them
And they need not stay.

• • •

45

Why do they grumble so much?
He comes like a benison
They should be glad he has not forgotten them
They might have had to go on.

• • •

These thoughts are depressing I know. They are
depressing,
I wish I was more cheerful, it is more pleasant,
Also it is a duty, we should smile as well as
submitting
To the purpose of One Above who is experimenting
50 With various mixtures of human character which
goes best,
All is interesting for him it is exciting, but not for us.
There I go again, Smile, smile, and get some work to
do
Then you will be practically unconscious without
positively having to go.

1962

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In the prefatory note to his poem "Kubla Khan" (1816), Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that he had dreamed the poem's vision under the effects of opium, and that, on awakening, he immediately started to write the poem. "At this moment," Coleridge says (referring to himself in the third person), "he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour"; afterward, trying to finish the poem, Coleridge found, "to his no small surprise and mortification," that the vision had vanished "like the images on the surface of a stream."

[Return to reference 1](#)

Pretty

Why is the word pretty so underrated?
In November the leaf is pretty when it falls
The stream grows deep in the woods after rain
And in the pretty pool the pike stalks

5 He stalks his prey, and this is pretty too,
The prey escapes with an underwater flash
But not for long, the great fish has him now
The pike is a fish who always has his prey

10 And this is pretty. The water rat is pretty
His paws are not webbed, he cannot shut his nostrils
As the otter can and the beaver, he is torn between
The land and water, Not "torn," he does not mind.

15 The owl hunts in the evening and it is pretty
The lake water below him rustles with ice
There is frost coming from the ground, in the air
mist
All this is pretty, it could not be prettier.

20 Yes, it could always be prettier, the eye abashes
It is becoming an eye that cannot see enough,
Out of the wood the eye climbs. This is prettier
A field in the evening, tilting up.

The field tilts to the sky. Though it is late
The sky is lighter than the hill field
All this looks easy but really it is extraordinary
Well, it is extraordinary to be so pretty.

And it is careless, and that is always pretty

25 This field, this owl, this pike, this pool are careless,
As Nature is always careless and indifferent
Who sees, who steps, means nothing, and this is
pretty.

30 So a person can come along like a thief—pretty!—
Stealing a look, pinching the sound and feel,
Lick the icicle broken from the bank
And still say nothing at all, only cry pretty.

35 Cry pretty, pretty, pretty and you'll be able
Very soon not even to cry pretty
And so be delivered entirely from humanity
This is prettiest of all, it is very pretty.

1966

GEORGE ORWELL

1903–1950

“George Orwell” was the pseudonym of Eric Blair, who was born in the village of Motihari in Bengal, India, where his father was a British civil servant. He was sent to private school in England and won a scholarship to Eton, the foremost “public school” (that is, private boarding school) in the country. At these schools he became conscious of the difference between his own background and the wealthy backgrounds of many of his schoolmates. On leaving school he joined the Imperial Police in Burma (both Burma—now called Myanmar—and India were then still part of the British Empire). His service in Burma from 1922 to 1927 produced a sense of guilt about British colonialism and a feeling that he had to make some personal expiation for it. This he would later do with an anticolonial novel, *Burmese Days* (1934), and essays such as “Shooting an Elephant” (1936), which subordinates lingering colonial attitudes to fiercely anti-imperial insights. He returned to England determined to be a writer and adopted his pseudonym as one way of escaping from the class position in which his elite education placed him. He went to Paris to try to earn a living by teaching while he made his first attempts at writing. His extremely difficult time in Paris was followed by a spell as a tramp in England, and he vividly recorded both experiences in his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). Orwell did not have to suffer the dire poverty that he seems to have courted (he had influential friends who would have been

glad to help him); he wanted, however, to learn firsthand about the life of the poor, both out of humane curiosity and because, as he wrote, if he did so “part of my guilt would drop from me.”

The Road to Wigan Pier (1937) discusses the experiences Orwell shared with unemployed miners in the north of England. The book pleased neither the left nor the right, for by now Orwell was showing what was to become his characteristic independence of mind on political and social questions: he wrote of what he knew firsthand to be true and was contemptuous of ideologies. He never joined a political party but regarded himself as a man of the uncommitted and independent left.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 after General Franco raised his military rebellion against the elected government, Orwell went there as a reporter and stayed to fight on the Republican side, rising to the rank of second lieutenant and suffering a throat wound. His *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) strongly criticized the Communist part in the civil war and showed from his own experience how the Communist Party in Spain was out to destroy anarchists, Trotskyists, and any others on the Republican side who were suspected of not toeing the Stalinist line; it aroused great indignation on the left in Britain and elsewhere, for many leftists believed that they should solidly support the Soviet Union and the Communist Party as the natural leaders in the struggle against international fascism. Orwell never wavered in his belief that while profound social change was necessary and desirable in capitalist countries of the West, the so-called socialism established in Soviet Russia was a perversion of socialism and a wicked tyranny. In *Animal Farm* (1945) he wrote a fable showing how such a perversion of socialism could develop, while in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (1949), when he was an embittered man dying of tuberculosis, he wrote a savagely powerful novel depicting a totalitarian future, where the government uses the language of socialism to cover a tyranny that systematically destroys the human spirit. In that vision of hell on Earth, language has become one of the principal instruments of oppression. The Ministry of Truth is concerned with the transmission

of untruth, and the white face of its pyramidal structure proclaims in "Newspeak" the three slogans of the party: "WAR IS PEACE / FREEDOM IS SLAVERY / IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH." Three years before Orwell formulated "Newspeak," "doublespeak," and "Big Brother is watching you," he had explored in one of his most influential essays, "Politics and the English Language," the decay of language and the ways in which that decay might be resisted. The decades that have passed since he wrote the piece have only confirmed the accuracy of its diagnosis and the value of its prescription.

Orwell was an outstanding journalist, and the essays he wrote regularly for the left-wing British journal *Tribune* and other periodicals include some of his best work. His independent eye made him both a permanent misfit politically and a brilliantly original writer.

Shooting an Elephant

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel¹ juice over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically—and secretly, of course—I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos—all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British

Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, *in saecula saeculorum*,² upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism—the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful *in terrorem*.³ Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone "must."⁴ It had been chained up as tame elephants always are when their attack of "must" is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout,⁵ the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but he had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van, and, when the driver jumped out and

took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violence upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm-leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone, and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalised cry of "Go away, child! Go away this instant!" and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something there that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie,⁶ almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I

sent an orderly to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelled the elephant.

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of their houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides, they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant—I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary—and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eighty yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant—it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery—and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of "must" was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in

the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes—faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjuror about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realised that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalised figure of a sahib.⁷ For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives" and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing—no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a *large* animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks—five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behaviour. If he charged I could shoot, if he took no notice of me it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of "natives"; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim.

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from

innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one should shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole; actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick—one never does when a shot goes home—but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time—it might have been five seconds, I dare say—he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open—I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did

not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were arriving with dahs⁸ and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee⁹ coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

1936

Endnotes

- Note 1: Leaf and seed of a plant chewed as a stimulant in Burma and other Eastern countries.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: For ever and ever (Latin). "Raj": rule (Hindi).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: To frighten it (Latin).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A state of sexual frenzy to which certain animals are subject at irregular intervals.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Elephant driver (Hindi).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Hired laborer (disputed origin). "Dravidian": a South Asian people.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: White gentleman (Urdu).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Short heavy swords (Burmese).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From the seaport Coringa, on the east coast of Madras in British India.[Return to reference 9](#)

Politics and the English Language

Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilisation is decadent, and our language—so the argument runs—must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers. I will come back to this presently, and I hope that by that time the meaning of what I have said here will have become clearer. Meanwhile, here are five specimens of the English language as it is now habitually written.

These five passages have not been picked out because they are especially bad—I could have quoted far worse if I had chosen—but

because they illustrate various of the mental vices from which we now suffer. They are a little below the average, but are fairly representative samples. I number them so that I can refer back to them when necessary:

1. I am not, indeed, sure whether it is not true to say that the Milton who once seemed not unlike a seventeenth-century Shelley had not become, out of an experience ever more bitter in each year, more alien (sic)¹ the founder of that Jesuit sect which nothing could induce him to tolerate.

Professor Harold Laski (Essay in *Freedom of Expression*).

2. Above all, we cannot play ducks and drakes with a native battery of idioms which prescribes such egregious collocations of vocables as the Basic *put up with* for *tolerate* or *put at a loss* for *bewilder*.

Professor Lancelot Hogben (*Interglossa*).

3. On the one side we have the free personality: by definition it is not neurotic, for it has neither conflict nor dream. Its desires, such as they are, are transparent, for they are just what institutional approval keeps in the forefront of consciousness; another institutional pattern would alter their number and intensity; there is little in them that is natural, irreducible, or culturally dangerous. But *on the other side*, the social bond itself is nothing but the mutual reflection of these self-secure integrities. Recall the definition of love. Is not this the very picture of a small academic? Where is there a place in this hall of mirrors for either personality or fraternity?

Essay on psychology in *Politics* (New York).

4. All the "best people" from the gentlemen's clubs, and all the frantic Fascist captains, united in common hatred of Socialism and bestial horror of the rising tide of the mass revolutionary movement, have turned to acts of provocation, to foul incendiarism, to medieval legends of poisoned wells, to legalise

their own destruction to proletarian organisations, and rouse the agitated petty-bourgeoisie to chauvinistic fervour on behalf of the fight against the revolutionary way out of the crisis.

Communist pamphlet.

5. If a new spirit *is* to be infused into this old country, there is one thorny and contentious reform which must be tackled, and that is the humanisation and galvanisation of the BBC.² Timidity here will bespeak canker and atrophy of the soul. The heart of Britain may be sound and of strong beat, for instance, but the British lion's roar at present is like that of Bottom in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*—as gentle as any sucking dove. A virile new Britain cannot continue indefinitely to be traduced in the eyes, or rather ears, of the world by the effete languors of Langham Place, brazenly masquerading as "standard English." When the Voice of Britain is heard at nine o'clock, better far and infinitely less ludicrous to hear aitches³ honestly dropped than the present priggish, inflated, inhibited, school-ma'amish arch braying of blameless bashful mewing maidens!

Letter in *Tribune*.

Each of these passages has faults of its own, but, quite apart from avoidable ugliness, two qualities are common to all of them. The first is staleness of imagery: the other is lack of precision. The writer either has a meaning and cannot express it, or he inadvertently says something else, or he is almost indifferent as to whether his words mean anything or not. This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing. As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house. I list below, with notes and examples, various of the tricks by means of which the work of prose construction is habitually dodged:

Dying metaphors. A newly invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image, while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically "dead" (e.g., *iron resolution*) has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness. But in between these two classes there is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves. Examples are: *Ring the changes on, take up the cudgels for, toe the line, ride roughshod over, stand shoulder to shoulder with, play into the hands of, no axe to grind, grist to the mill, fishing in troubled waters, rift within the lute, on the order of the day, Achilles' heel, swan song, hotbed.* Many of these are used without knowledge of their meaning (What is a "rift," for instance?), and incompatible metaphors are frequently mixed, a sure sign that the writer is not interested in what he is saying. Some metaphors now current have been twisted out of their original meaning without those who use them even being aware of the fact. For example, *toe the line* is sometimes written *tow the line*. Another example is *the hammer and the anvil*, now always used with the implication that the anvil gets the worst of it. In real life it is always the anvil that breaks the hammer, never the other way about: a writer who stopped to think what he was saying would be aware of this, and would avoid perverting the original phrase.

Operators, or verbal false limbs. These save the trouble of picking out appropriate verbs and nouns, and at the same time pad each sentence with extra syllables which give it an appearance of symmetry. Characteristic phrases are: *render inoperative, militate against, prove unacceptable, make contact with, be subjected to, give rise to, give grounds for, have the effect of, play a leading part (rôle) in, make itself felt, take effect, exhibit a tendency to, serve the purpose of,* etc etc. The keynote is the elimination of simple verbs. Instead of being a single word, such as *break, stop, spoil, mend, kill*, a verb becomes a *phrase*, made up of a noun or adjective tacked on to some general-purposes verb such as *prove, serve, form, play,*

render. In addition, the passive voice is wherever possible used in preference to the active, and noun constructions are used instead of gerunds (*by examination of* instead of *by examining*). The range of verbs is further cut down by means of the *-ise* and *de-* formations, and banal statements are given an appearance of profundity by means of the *not un*formation. Simple conjunctions and prepositions are replaced by such phrases as *with respect to*, *having regard to*, *the fact that*, *by dint of*, *in view of*, *in the interests of*, *on the hypothesis that*; and the ends of sentences are saved from anticlimax by such resounding commonplaces as *greatly to be desired*, *cannot be left out of account*, *a development to be expected in the near future*, *deserving of serious consideration*, *brought to a satisfactory conclusion*, and so on and so forth.

Pretentious diction. Words like *phenomenon*, *element*, *individual* (as noun), *objective*, *categorical*, *effective*, *virtual*, *basic*, *primary*, *promote*, *constitute*, *exhibit*, *exploit*, *utilise*, *eliminate*, *liquidate*, are used to dress up simple statements and give an air of scientific impartiality to biased judgements. Adjectives like *epoch-making*, *epic*, *historic*, *unforgettable*, *triumphant*, *age-old*, *inevitable*, *inexorable*, *veritable*, are used to dignify the sordid processes of international politics, while writing that aims at glorifying war usually takes on an archaic colour, its characteristic words being: *realm*, *throne*, *chariot*, *mailed fist*, *trident*, *sword*, *shield*, *buckler*, *banner*, *jackboot*, *clarion*. Foreign words and expressions such as *cul de sac*, *ancien régime*, *deus ex machina*, *mutatis mutandis*, *status quo*, *Gleichschaltung*, *Weltanschauung*,⁴ are used to give an air of culture and elegance. Except for the useful abbreviations *i.e.*, *e.g.*, and *etc.*, there is no real need for any of the hundreds of foreign phrases now current in English. Bad writers, and especially scientific, political and sociological writers, are nearly always haunted by the notion that Latin or Greek words are grander than Saxon ones, and unnecessary words like *expedite*, *ameliorate*, *predict*, *extraneous*, *deracinated*, *clandestine*, *sub-aqueous* and hundreds of others constantly gain ground from their Anglo-Saxon opposite numbers.⁵ The jargon

peculiar to Marxist writing (*hyena, hangman, cannibal, petty bourgeois, these gentry, lacquey, flunkey, mad dog, White Guard*, etc.) consists largely of words and phrases translated from Russian, German or French; but the normal way of coining a new word is to use a Latin or Greek root with the appropriate affix and, where necessary, the *-ise* formation. It is often easier to make up words of this kind (*deregionalise, impermissible, extramarital, non-fragmentatory* and so forth) than to think up the English words that will cover one's meaning. The result, in general, is an increase in slovenliness and vagueness.

Meaningless words. In certain lands of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are almost completely lacking in meaning.⁶ Words like *romantic, plastic, values, human, dead, sentimental, natural, vitality*, as used in art criticism, are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they not only do not point to any discoverable object, but are hardly even expected to do so by the reader. When one critic writes, "The outstanding features of Mr X's work is its living quality," while another writes, "The immediately striking thing about Mr X's work is its peculiar deadness," the reader accepts this as a simple difference of opinion. If words like *black* and *white* were involved, instead of the jargon words *dead* and *living*, he would see at once that language was being used in an improper way. Many political words are similarly abused. The word *Fascism* has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies "something not desirable." The words *democracy, socialism, freedom, patriotic, realistic, justice*, have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of régime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning. Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own

private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different. Statements like *Marshal Pétain*² was a true patriot, The Soviet press is the freest in the world, The Catholic Church is opposed to persecution, are almost always made with intent to deceive. Other words used in variable meanings, in most cases more or less dishonestly, are: *class, totalitarian, science, progressive, reactionary, bourgeois, equality*.

Now that I have made this catalogue of swindles and perversions, let me give another example of the kind of writing that they lead to. This time it must of its nature be an imaginary one. I am going to translate a passage of good English into modern English of the worst sort. Here is a well-known verse from *Ecclesiastes*:

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Here it is in modern English:

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.

This is a parody, but not a very gross one. Exhibit 3, above, for instance, contains several patches of the same kind of English. It will be seen that I have not made a full translation. The beginning and ending of the sentence follow the original meaning fairly closely, but in the middle the concrete illustrations—race, battle, bread—dissolve into the vague phrase “success or failure in competitive activities”. This had to be so, because no modern writer of the kind I am discussing—no one capable of using phrases like “objective consideration of contemporary phenomena”—would ever tabulate his thoughts in that precise and detailed way. The whole tendency of

modern prose is away from concreteness. Now analyse these two sentences a little more closely. The first contains 49 words but only 60 syllables, and all its words are those of everyday life. The second contains 38 words of 90 syllables: 18 of its words are from Latin roots, and one from Greek. The first sentence contains six vivid images, and only one phrase ("time and chance") that could be called vague. The second contains not a single fresh, arresting phrase, and in spite of its 90 syllables it gives only a shortened version of the meaning contained in the first. Yet without a doubt it is the second kind of sentence that is gaining ground in modern English. I do not want to exaggerate. This kind of writing is not yet universal, and outcrops of simplicity will occur here and there in the worst-written page. Still, if you or I were told to write a few lines on the uncertainty of human fortunes, we should probably come much nearer to my imaginary sentence than to the one from *Ecclesiastes*.

As I have tried to show, modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug. The attraction of this way of writing is that it is easy. It is easier—even quicker, once you have the habit—to say *In my opinion it is a not unjustifiable assumption that* than to say *I think*. If you use ready-made phrases, you not only don't have to hunt about for words; you also don't have to bother with the rhythms of your sentences, since these phrases are generally so arranged as to be more or less euphonious. When you are composing in a hurry—when you are dictating to a stenographer, for instance, or making a public speech—it is natural to fall into a pretentious, latinised style. Tags like *a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind* or *a conclusion to which all of us would readily assent* will save many a sentence from coming down with a bump. By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself. This is the significance of mixed metaphors. The sole aim of

a metaphor is to call up a visual image. When these images clash—as in *The Fascist octopus has sung its swan song, the jackboot is thrown into the melting-pot*—it can be taken as certain that the writer is not seeing a mental image of the objects he is naming; in other words he is not really thinking. Look again at the examples I gave at the beginning of this essay. Professor Laski (1) uses five negatives in 53 words. One of these is superfluous, making nonsense of the whole passage, and in addition there is the slip *alien* for *akin*, making further nonsense, and several avoidable pieces of clumsiness which increase the general vagueness. Professor Hogben (2) plays ducks and drakes with a battery which is able to write prescriptions, and, while disapproving of the everyday phrase *put up with*, is unwilling to look *egregious* up in the dictionary and see what it means. (3), if one takes an uncharitable attitude towards it, is simply meaningless: probably one could work out its intended meaning by reading the whole of the article in which it occurs. In (4) the writer knows more or less what he wants to say, but an accumulation of stale phrases chokes him like tea-leaves blocking a sink. In (5) words and meaning have almost parted company. People who write in this manner usually have a general emotional meaning—they dislike one thing and want to express solidarity with another—but they are not interested in the detail of what they are saying. A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you—even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent—and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself. It is at this point that the special connection between politics and the debasement of language becomes clear.

In our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where it is not true, it will generally be found that the writer is some kind of rebel, expressing his private opinions, and not a "party line." Orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style. The political dialects to be found in pamphlets, leading articles, manifestos, White Papers and the speeches of Under-Secretaries⁸ do, of course, vary from party to party, but they are all alike in that one almost never finds in them a fresh, vivid, homemade turn of speech. When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases—*bestial atrocities, iron heel, blood-stained tyranny, free peoples of the world, stand shoulder to shoulder*—one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance towards turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity.

In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India,⁹ the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with

incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, "I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so." Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:

While freely conceding that the Soviet régime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigours which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.

The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as "keeping out of politics." All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find—this is a guess which I have not sufficient knowledge to verify—that the German, Russian and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years, as a result of dictatorship.

But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even

among people who should and do know better. The debased language that I have been discussing is in some ways very convenient. Phrases like a *not unjustifiable assumption, leaves much to be desired, would serve no good purpose, a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind*, are a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at one's elbow. Look back through this essay, and for certain you will find that I have again and again committed the very faults I am protesting against. By this morning's post I have received a pamphlet dealing with conditions in Germany. The author tells me that he "felt impelled" to write it. I open it at random, and here is almost the first sentence that I see: "(The Allies) have an opportunity not only of achieving a radical transformation of Germany's social and political structure in such a way as to avoid a nationalistic reaction in Germany itself, but at the same time of laying the foundations of a co-operative and unified Europe." You see, he "feels impelled" to write—feels, presumably, that he has something new to say—and yet his words, like cavalry horses answering the bugle, group themselves automatically into the familiar dreary pattern. This invasion of one's mind by ready-made phrases (*lay the foundations, achieve a radical transformation*) can only be prevented if one is constantly on guard against them, and every such phrase anaesthetises a portion of one's brain.

I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions. So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. Silly words and expressions have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process but owing to the conscious action of a minority. Two recent examples were *explore every avenue* and *leave no stone unturned*, which were killed by the jeers of a few journalists. There is a long list of fly-blown metaphors which could similarly be got rid of if enough people would interest themselves in the job; and it should also be possible to laugh the *not un*formation

out of existence,¹ to reduce the amount of Latin and Greek in the average sentence, to drive out foreign phrases and strayed scientific words, and, in general, to make pretentiousness unfashionable. But all these are minor points. The defence of the English language implies more than this, and perhaps it is best to start by saying what it does *not* imply.

To begin with, it has nothing to do with archaism, with the salvaging of obsolete words and turns of speech, or with the setting-up of a "standard English" which must never be departed from. On the contrary, it is especially concerned with the scrapping of every word or idiom which has outworn its usefulness. It has nothing to do with correct grammar and syntax, which are of no importance so long as one makes one's meaning clear, or with the avoidance of Americanisms, or with having what is called a "good prose style." On the other hand it is not concerned with fake simplicity and the attempt to make written English colloquial. Nor does it even imply in every case preferring the Saxon word to the Latin one, though it does imply using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one's meaning. What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about. In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is to surrender to them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualising, you probably hunt about till you find the exact words that seem to fit it. When you think of something abstract you are more inclined to use words from the start, and unless you make a conscious effort to prevent it, the existing dialect will come rushing in and do the job for you, at the expense of blurring or even changing your meaning. Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures or sensations. Afterwards one can choose—not simply *accept*—the phrases that will best cover the meaning, and then switch round and decide what impression one's words are likely to make on another person. This last effort of the mind cuts out all stale or mixed images, all prefabricated phrases, needless repetitions, and humbug and

vagueness generally. But one can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails. I think the following rules will cover most cases:

- i. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- ii. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- iii. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- iv. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- v. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- vi. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

These rules sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable. One could keep all of them and still write bad English, but one could not write the kind of stuff that I quoted in those five specimens at the beginning of this article.

I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought. Stuart Chase and others have come near to claiming that all abstract words are meaningless, and have used this as a pretext for advocating a kind of political quietism. Since you don't know what Fascism is, how can you struggle against Fascism? One need not swallow such absurdities as this, but one ought to recognise that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end. If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from

time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase—some *jackboot*, *Achilles' heel*, *hotbed*, *melting pot*, *acid test*, *veritable inferno* or other lump of verbal refuse—into the dustbin where it belongs.

1946, 1947

Endnotes

- Note 1: Thus (Latin), that is, that's the way it was written.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British Broadcasting Corporation.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, *h* sounds, which are not aspirated in the colloquial speech of some English accents. During—and for some time after—World War II, few programs had a larger audience than the evening nine o'clock news. "Langham Place": the location of the BBC's main offices in London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Respectively: dead end (French), former system of government (French), the god from the machine (Latin), with the necessary changes (Latin), the existing state of things (Latin), standardization of political institutions among authoritarian states (German), and philosophy of life (German).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
An interesting illustration of this is the way in which the English flower names which were in use till very recently are being ousted by Greek ones, *snapdragon* becoming *antirrhinum*, *forget-me-not* becoming *myosotis*, etc. It is hard to see any practical reason for this change of fashion: it is probably due to an instinctive turning-away from the more homely word and a vague feeling that the Greek word is scientific [*Orwell's note*].
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:
Example: "Comfort's catholicity of perception and image, strangely Whitmanesque in range, almost the exact opposite in

aesthetic compulsion, continues to evoke that trembling atmospheric accumulative hinting at a cruel, an inexorably serene timelessness . . . Wrey Gardiner scores by aiming at simple bullseyes with precision. Only they are not so simple, and through this contented sadness runs more than the surface bitter-sweet of resignation." (*Poetry Quarterly*.) [*Orwell's note*].

[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: French army officer (1856–1951), head of the Vichy government that collaborated with Germany in World War II. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Senior British civil servants. "White Papers": official documents, each on a particular topic, issued by the British government. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: This ended in 1947. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: One can cure oneself of the *not un-* formation by memorising this sentence: *A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field* [*Orwell's note*]. [Return to reference 1](#)

MULK RAJ ANAND

1905–2004

Mulk Raj Anand was born in Peshawar, a region of British India that is now part of Pakistan. His father was from a family of coppersmiths, but left the trade to work as a clerk in the British Army. Anand attended a cantonment (military base) school in his youth before heading to Khalsa College in Amritsar, the city in northern India that had been the site of the infamous 1919 massacre during which unarmed and peaceful Indian protesters were shot by British soldiers. Anand graduated from Khalsa in 1924 and traveled to London, where he completed a doctorate in philosophy at University College London. Anand's literary career spanned more than seventy-five years. He wrote thirteen novels, nine short story collections, and four memoirs, as well as hundreds of essays on the topics of Indian literature, politics, philosophy, and art. He is one of the foundational figures of the Indian novel in English.

Despite his father's work in the British army, Anand held strong anticolonial views, which shaped his various circles of friends in London. He worked part-time as a copy editor at the Hogarth Press, owned by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, and this job led him to formative encounters with the elite Bloomsbury Group. There he met E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey, and art critic Roger Fry. Anand also lectured part-time at the Workers Educational Association, the largest provider of adult education to working

people in Britain. Leftist politics, social realism, and a dash of modernism shaped his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), which portrays one day in the life of Bakha, a street sweeper and member of the stigmatized “untouchable” class that fell outside and below the Hindu caste system organizing much of Indian society. Anand employed the day-novel structure first associated with James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, but he turned it to specifically political and reformist ends. Representing the interiority of a member of an outcast group was itself groundbreaking in its moment, and Anand brought the plight of the downtrodden to life in order to unite the fight for Indian independence from Britain and the campaign for civil rights within Indian society.

Anand was founding president of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association, a leading organization in the independence movement. The manifesto of the organization sought to wrest literature away from academics and authority figures in order to bring fiction closer to the lives and experiences of working-class people. His proletarian novels *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) centered on child labor and the exploitation of workers on Indian tea plantations. His war novel *Across Black Waters* (1940), published during World War II, explored the oft-erased histories of Indian soldiers fighting on behalf of Britain in World War I, and drew on Anand’s own wartime experiences fighting with the anti-fascist Republican movement during the Spanish Civil War.

Anand moved between India and Europe throughout the 1930s and 1940s, but returned to India after the dissolution of his first marriage and ensuing mental distress. He recovered with the aid of classical dancer and later wife Shirin Vajibdar, who advised him to write about his inner turmoil. Departing from his proletarian fiction, Anand adopted a more autobiographical mode and wrote an unfinished series of novels inspired by William Shakespeare’s reference to the seven ages of man. In these novels, Anand creates an alter-ego, Krishan Chander Azad, who experiences each age of life against the background of major historical events, including World War I and the massacre at Amritsar. Anand published his last

major novel, *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*, in 1957, using the royal court as a setting through which to explore the foibles of a rich prince who abuses his constituency out of misguided love for his mistress. The novel is distinct in Anand's oeuvre for its detailed attention to a damaged psyche.

Anand's short stories are more richly folkloric than his novels, and draw on the oral traditions of the Punjab (North India) as channeled through the childhood memories of his mother's storytelling. Anand published several collections of folk tales and fairy tales, but referred to his ideal short stories as "neo-folk tales" that would combine ancient myth and local custom with modern forms of character and psychology. "The Liar" exemplifies the neo-folk tale in which the ordinary art of storytelling both illuminates and suspends the social divisions of caste. The narrator, a young upper-caste child, forms a friendship with the low-caste hunter Labhu, whose fantastic tales are dismissed by the privileged men whom he leads on hunting trips. Anand treats the character of Labhu with sympathy and suggests that outlandish stories can be a necessary response to real-world indignities.

The Liar

Labhu, the old shikari¹ of my village, was a born liar. Therefore he had won the reputation of being the best storyteller in our parts. And though a sweeper of low caste,² he was honoured by all and sundry. He was tolerated even to the extent of being given a seat at the foot of the banyan tree. And my mother did not insist too harshly on the necessity of my taking a bath to purify myself every time I had been seen listening to one of his uncanny tales with the other village boys.

Labhu was a thin, little man, with the glint of a lance and the glide of an arrow. His wiry, weather-beaten frame must have had immense reserves of energy, to judge by the way he could chase stags up the steep crags of the hills behind our village and run abreast of the bay mare of Subedar³ Deep Singh to whose household he was attached as a shikari, except when some English official, a rich white merchant, or a guest of the subedar, engaged him for a season. It was perhaps this wonderful physical agility of his that had persuaded him to adopt the profession of a shikari. Labhu had also a sensitive, dark face, of which the lower lip trembled as it pronounced the first accents of a poignant verse or the last words of a gruesome hunting story. And it was the strange spell that his tragic verses and weird stories cast on me that made me his devoted follower through childhood. He taught me to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds; he taught me the way to track all the wild animals; and he taught me how to concoct a cock-and-bull story to tell my father if I had to make an excuse for not being at home during the reign of the hot sun.

His teaching was, of course, by example, as I was rather a critical pupil.

'Labhu,' I would say, 'I am sure it is impossible to track any prey when you are half up the side of a hillock.'

'Acha,' he would say, 'I will show you. Stand still and listen.'

I did so and we both heard a pebble drop. Up he darted on the stony ridge in the direction whence the sound had come, jumping from crag to crag, securing a precarious foothold on a small stone here and a sure one on a boulder there, till he was tearing through a flock of sheep, towards a little gully where a ram had taken shelter in a cave, secure in the belief that it would escape its pursuer.

'All right,' I would say. 'You may have been able to track this ram, but I don't believe that yarn of yours about the devil-ram you saw when you were hunting with the subedar.'

'I swear by God Almighty,' he said, 'it is true. The subedar will tell you that he saw this terrible apparition with me. It was a beast about the size of an elephant, with eyes as big as hen's eggs and a beard as long as that of Maulvi Shah Din, the priest of the mosque, only not henna-dyed and red, but blue-black; it had huge ears as big as an elephant's, which did not flap, however, but pricked up like the ears of the subedar's horse; it had a nose like that of the wife of the Missionary sahib,⁴ and it had square jaws which showed teeth almost as big as the chunks of marble which lie outside the temple, as it laughed at the subedar. It appeared unexpectedly near the peak of Devi Parbat.⁵ The subedar and I had ascended about twelve thousand feet up the mountain in search of game, when suddenly, out of the spirit world that always waits about us in the living air, there was the clattering of stones and boulders, the whistling of sharp winds, the gurgling of thunder and a huge crack on the side of the mountain. Then an enormous figure seemed to rise. From a distance it seemed to both of us like a dark patch, and we thought it was an oorial⁶ and began to stalk towards it. What was our surprise, however, when, as soon as we saw it stand there, facing us with its glistening, white eyes as big as a hen's eggs, it sneezed and ripped the mountainside with a kick of its forefeet and disappeared. The mountain shook and the subedar trembled, while I stood bravely where I was and laughed till I wept with joy at my good luck in having seen so marvellous a manifestation of the devil-god of the

tribe of rams. I tell you, son, please God I shall show him to you one of these days.'

'Labhu, you don't mean to say so!' I said, half incredulous, though I was fascinated by the chimera.⁷

'Of course I mean to say so, silly boy,' said Labhu. 'This is nothing compared to the other vision that was vouchsafed to me, praise be to God, when I was on the journey to Ladakh, hunting with Jolly John Sahib.' And he began to relate a fantastic story of a colossal snake, which was so improbable that even I did not believe it.

'Oh, you are a fool, Labhu,' I said. 'And you are a liar. Everybody says so. And I don't believe you at all. My mother says I am silly to believe your tales.'

'All right, then, if you don't believe my stories why do you come here to listen to them?' he said, with wounded pride. 'Go, I shall never teach you anything more, and I shall certainly not let you accompany me to the hunts.'

'All right,' I said, chagrined and stubborn. 'I don't want to speak to you either.'

And I ran home bursting with indignation at having forced a quarrel upon Labhu, when really he only told me his stories for my amusement.

Labhu went away for a while on a hunting tour with the subedar. He didn't come back to the village when this tour finished, because Subedar Deep Singh's eldest son, Kuldeep Singh, who was a lieutenant in the army, took him for a trip across the Himalayas to Nepal.

During this time, though I regretted Labhu's absence, I lent my ear readily to the malicious misrepresentation of his character that the subedar and his employers, and occasionally also my father, indulged in; because, though superior to Labhu by caste, they were not such good shots as he was.

'He can only wait by a forest pool or a safe footpath to shoot at some unfortunate beast, this Labhu!' said the subedar. 'And often he shoots in the dark with that inefficient powder-gun⁸ of his. He is no good except for tracking.'

'Yes,' said my father, 'he is a vain boaster and a liar. The only beast he dared to shoot at while he was with me was a hare, and even that he hit in the leg.'

I waited eagerly for Labhu's return to confirm from his very mouth these stories of his incompetence, because, though incredulous of this scandal, I had been driven to a frenzy of chagrin by his insulting dismissal of me. I thought I would ask him point-blank whether he was really as bad a hunter as the subedar and my father made him out to be.

When Labhu came back, however, he limped about and seemed ill. I was very sad to see him broken and dispirited. And I forgot all the scandal I had heard about him in my bafflement at the sudden change that had come into his character, for he was now no longer the garrulous man who sat telling stories to old men and young boys, but a strangely reticent creature who lay in a stupor all day, moaning and murmuring to himself in a prolonged delirium, except that he occasionally hobbled out with a huge staff in his hand in the evenings.

I was afraid to go near him, because he always wore a forbidding, angry look. But the villagers didn't seem to think there was anything the matter with Labhu, as I heard them say, 'Now that we have no patience with him and his stories, he spends most of his time telling them to himself, the fool!'

I owed a loyalty to Labhu, for I had discovered a kinship in my make-up for all those extravagances for which the shikari was so well known.

So I went up to him one day, as he lay on a broken string bed near his mud hut, under the precarious shelter which a young pipal⁹ gave him.

'You have returned then, Master Labhu,' I said.

'Yes,' he said, 'I have been back some time, son. I looked for you, but you did not seem to be about. But you know, the man who is slain cannot walk even to his own house. This leg of mine pains me and I can't get about as I used to.'

'What happened to your leg, then?' I asked, realizing that he had forgotten all about our past quarrels and was as kind and communicative to me as before. 'Did you fall down a cliff or something?'

'No,' he said in a tired voice. And he kept quiet for a long while.

'What happened, then?' I persisted.

'You know, son,' Labhu began, at first pale and hesitant, then smiling and lifting his eyebrows in the familiar manner of the old days, 'I went away on a hunting tour in the pay of the subedar's eldest son, Kuldeep Singh, and some of his friends. Well, we went to Nepal through the Kulu valley. They had no experience of hunting in this or in any other part of the world, and I led them across such trails as I knew and such as the local shikaris told me about. That boy, Kuldeep, I don't know what he does in the army, but he can't shoot at any range, and the sahibs with him were clumsy, purblind white men. I would point to a beast with my stick, and, though they could see the hide before their eyes, they bungled with their guns or were too noisy on their feet, and away crashed the bull which we had been tracking. I would grunt, shrug my shoulders and did not mind, because they were like children. They had finished hundreds of cartridges and had not shot anything, and daily begged me to help them to secure some game.

'At first I told them that game doesn't taste sweet unless it is shot by oneself. But at length I took pity on them and thought that I would secure them a good mixed bag. I shot twelve tigers with my gun and fifteen panthers in the course of seven days, and many stags.

'On the eighth day we saw a monster which had the body of a bear, the head of a reindeer, the feet of a goat, the tail of a wild bull and a glistening, fibrous tissue all round it like the white silken veil which the Rani¹ of Boondi wore when she came to visit Subedar Deep Singh's wife. Kuldeep Singh and the sahibs were very frightened of this apparition and said it was the devil himself who had the shape of an earthly being and who would soon breathe a breath which would mix with the still air of the night and poison life.

'They were all for killing it outright, while I was sure that it was only a princess of the royal house of Nepal who had been transformed by some magician into this fantastic shape and size. And I wanted to catch it alive and bring it home to be my bride.'

Labhu went on to relate how beautiful she was and how he resolved to restore her to her normal self by reading magical incantations.

'I told her I loved her,' he continued, 'and she smiled shyly. But some fool, I think it was the subedar's son, fired a volley of shots, which frightened her so that she ran, became one with the air and began to ascend the snowy peaks of Kailash Parbat.²

'I was bent on rescuing my beloved, and I leapt from one mountain to another, calling after her to stop. But that idiot Kuldeep and the sahibs kept on shooting and roused the magician who kept guard over her. And this evil sage threw a huge mountain of snow at me to kill me.

'I just blew a hot breath and the mountain of snow cracked into a million pieces and hung about the sky like glittering stars.

'Then the magician struck the earth with his feet and opened up a grave to bury me alive. I leapt right across the fissure and found myself on a peak in the land of the lama³ who never dies.

'By now, of course, the magician had hidden the beauty away in some cave. So I gave up the chase, as there was the doom of death about this beauty, anyhow, and I made one leap across the Himalayas for home . . .'

'And as you landed this side of the mountains you sprained your foot,' I said.

Labhu lifted his eyebrows funnily in the manner of the old days and, laughing, said, 'Have I told you this story before, then?'

1944

Endnotes

- Note 1: A professional hunter or guide.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A division of society. In India the caste system was a varied and fluid hierarchy whose boundaries became more rigid and defined under British colonialism. The four main caste divisions in British India were Brahmin (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (farmers/traders/merchants), and Shudras (laborers and commoners). In addition, a fifth group, once considered outcast or “untouchable,” existed below and outside the system.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The second-highest rank of an Indian officer in the military of British India.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A title of respect or polite address for a man.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: This likely refers to Nanda Devi, the second-highest mountain in India.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A horned sheep native to the Himalayas.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: From the Greek monster with a lion’s head, a goat’s body, and a serpent’s tail; any mythical animal made up of parts from other animals.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Historical gun loaded from the open end of the barrel as opposed to side-loading guns with bullets.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A type of tree also known as the sacred fig, considered to have religious significance in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, and often used for meditation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A queen; the female title for rulers in India, like the wife of a Raja.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Mount Kailash, a sacred mountain in Tibet. In Hinduism, it is the home of the god Shiva. It is also important in Buddhism and Jainism.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Tibet. In Buddhism, the Dalai Lama never dies; his spirit is passed on to another human.[Return to reference 3](#)

SAMUEL BECKETT

1906–1989

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin. Like W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, and Oscar Wilde, he came from an Anglo-Irish Protestant family. He received a B.A. from Trinity College, Dublin, and after teaching English at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris for two years, returned to Trinity College to take his M.A. in 1931. A year later he gave up teaching to write, and having produced an insightful essay on the early stages of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Beckett also worked as Joyce's amanuensis (secretary) and translator. In 1937 he settled permanently in Paris. There, during World War II, he joined an underground group in the anti-Nazi resistance and, after the group was betrayed, barely escaped into unoccupied France. From the mid-1940s he generally wrote in French and subsequently translated some of his work into an eloquent, Irish-inflected English. His early novels—*Murphy* (1938; Eng. trans., 1957); *Watt* (1953); and the trilogy, *Molloy* (1951; 1955), *Malone Dies* (1951; 1956), and *The Unnameable* (1953; 1958)—have been hailed as masterpieces and precursors of postmodern fiction; but he is best known for his plays, especially *Waiting for Godot* (1952; 1954) and *Endgame* (1957; 1958). He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969.

Not much happens in a Beckett play; there is little characterization, little plot, and little incident. Characters engage in dialogue or dialectical monologues that go nowhere. There is no progression, no development, no resolution. Rambling exchanges

and repetitive actions enact the lack of a fixed center, of meaning, of purpose, in the lives depicted. Yet the characters persist in their habitual, almost ritualistic, activities; they go on talking, even if only to themselves. In spite of the reiterated theme of nonexistence, the characters go on existing—if minimally: a stream of discourse, of thought and will, a consciousness questioning its own meaning and purpose. In *Waiting for Godot* the main characters wait for an arrival that is constantly deferred. They inhabit a bleak landscape seemingly confined to one road, one tree; they talk of moving on, yet never leave. In *Endgame* the main characters—irritable and peevish—live inside a room with two small, high windows, outside of which everything may or may not be dead. Two of their parents live inside garbage cans and appear only from the shoulders up. Subsequent plays restrict the acting space to smaller spaces, such as urns or a mound in which the actor is buried; characters are physically confined or disabled, until *Not I* (1973) presents the most minimal embodiment of human consciousness available to theatrical representation: a disembodied mouth.



***Waiting for Godot* at the Théâtre Hebertot in Paris, 1956.**

Like the 1953 premiere in French and 1955 in English, the Paris revival of *Waiting for Godot* had a spare, minimalist set. Pozzo (far right) holds a whip and a rope that goes around Lucky's neck, while Lucky holds a bag, picnic basket, folding stool, and greatcoat. The play's central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, look on in puzzlement.

Beckett focuses his work on fundamental questions of existence and nonexistence, the mind and the body, the self as known from within and as seen from the outside or in retrospect. Joyce's artistic

integrity and stream of consciousness technique influenced him, but the minimalism of Beckett's plays and fiction contrast with the maximalism of Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. "I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, in control of one's material," he told the biographer James Knowlson. "I realised my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding."

The daring minimalism of *Waiting for Godot*—its radically diminished setting, clownish characters, and circular plot—is often seen as having transformed serious theater for the second half of the twentieth century. Because Act II of the play largely repeats Act I, with subtle variations, the Irish critic Vivian Mercier famously called *Waiting for Godot* "a play in which nothing happens, twice." As they wait for an appointment with the mysteriously indeterminate Godot, the play's central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, nicknamed Didi and Gogo, haplessly amuse, comfort, and annoy each other. The play implicitly contrasts their affable, if vexed, friendship with the master-slave relation between another pair of characters who appear twice on the scene: the sometimes brutal Pozzo and the ironically named Lucky, whipped and driven like an animal by his master. As in subsequent Beckett plays, this one juxtaposes vaudeville, slapstick, and other comic traditions with stark insight into the meaningless void beneath our feet, however we may try to cover it up by speech and action. Blinded and humbled by the second act, Pozzo cries out, "one day we were born, one day we shall die," adding, "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." Combining such bleak pathos with horseplay, banter, pranks, juggling, and crude puns, *Waiting for Godot* shares its tragicomic quality with absurdist drama, which disrupts the conventions of realist drama, draws attention to its own fictionality, and refuses to provide hierarchies of significance. Reduced to bare essentials, desperately seeking ways to pass the time during their seemingly interminable wait, the characters in *Waiting for Godot*—though often behaving as if bumbling protagonists of a farce—raise unsettling questions about meaning and absurdity, power and dependency, time and repetition, language and death.

Waiting for Godot

A Tragicomedy in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

ESTRAGON POZZO

VLADIMIR A BOY

LUCKY

Act 1

*A country road. A tree.
Evening.*

[ESTRAGON, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.]

[Enter VLADIMIR.]

ESTRAGON *[giving up again]* Nothing to be done.

VLADIMIR *[advancing with short, stiff strides, legs wide apart]*

I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. *[He broods, musing on the struggle. Turning to ESTRAGON.]* So there you are again.

ESTRAGON Am I?

VLADIMIR I'm glad to see you back. I thought you were gone for ever.

ESTRAGON Me too.

VLADIMIR Together again at last! We'll have to celebrate this.

But how? *[He reflects.]* Get up till I embrace you.

ESTRAGON *[irritably]* Not now, not now.

VLADIMIR *[hurt, coldly]* May one enquire where His Highness spent the night?

ESTRAGON In a ditch.

VLADIMIR *[admiringly]* A ditch! Where?

ESTRAGON *[without gesture]* Over there.

VLADIMIR And they didn't beat you?

ESTRAGON Beat me? Certainly they beat me.

VLADIMIR The same lot as usual?

ESTRAGON The same? I don't know.

VLADIMIR When I think of it . . . all these years . . . but for me . . . where would you be . . . *[Decisively.]* You'd be nothing

more than a little heap of bones at the present minute, no doubt about it.

ESTRAGON And what of it?

VLADIMIR [*gloomily*] It's too much for one man. [*Pause.*

Cheerfully.] On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties.¹

ESTRAGON Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody thing.

VLADIMIR Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first.² We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up. [ESTRAGON *tears at his boot.*] What are you doing?

ESTRAGON Taking off my boot. Did that never happen to you?

VLADIMIR Boots must be taken off every day, I'm tired telling you that. Why don't you listen to me?

ESTRAGON [*feebly*] Help me!

VLADIMIR It hurts?

ESTRAGON [*angrily*] Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

VLADIMIR [*angrily*] No one ever suffers but you. I don't count. I'd like to hear what you'd say if you had what I have.

ESTRAGON It hurts?

VLADIMIR [*angrily*] Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!

ESTRAGON [*pointing*] You might button it all the same.

VLADIMIR [*stooping*] True. [*He buttons his fly.*] Never neglect the little things of life.

ESTRAGON What do you expect, you always wait till the last moment.

VLADIMIR [*musingly*] The last moment . . . [*He meditates.*] Hope deferred maketh the something sick, who said that?³

ESTRAGON Why don't you help me?

VLADIMIR Sometimes I feel it coming all the same. Then I go all queer. [*He takes off his hat, peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, puts it on again.*] How shall I say? Relieved and at the same time . . . [*He searches for the word.*] . . .

appalled. [*With emphasis.*] AP-PALLED. [*He takes off his hat again, peers inside it.*] Funny. [*He knocks on the crown as though to dislodge a foreign body, peers into it again, puts it on again.*] Nothing to be done. [ESTRAGON *with a supreme effort succeeds in pulling off his boot. He peers inside it, feels about inside it, turns it upside down, shakes it, looks on the ground to see if anything has fallen out, finds nothing, feels inside it again, staring sightlessly before him.*] Well?

ESTRAGON Nothing.

VLADIMIR Show.

ESTRAGON There's nothing to show.

VLADIMIR Try and put it on again.

ESTRAGON [*examining his foot*] I'll air it for a bit.

VLADIMIR There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet. [*He takes off his hat again, peers inside it, feels about inside it, knocks on the crown, blows into it, puts it on again.*] This is getting alarming. [*Silence. Vladimir deep in thought, Estragon pulling at his toes.*] One of the thieves was saved.⁴ [*Pause.*] It's a reasonable percentage. [*Pause.*] Gogo.

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR Suppose we repented.

ESTRAGON Repented what?

VLADIMIR Oh . . . [*He reflects.*] We wouldn't have to go into the details.

ESTRAGON Our being born?

 [VLADIMIR *breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.*]

VLADIMIR One daren't even laugh any more.

ESTRAGON Dreadful privation.

VLADIMIR Merely smile. [*He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly.*] It's not the same thing. Nothing to be done. [*Pause.*] Gogo.

ESTRAGON [*irritably*] What is it?

VLADIMIR Did you ever read the Bible?

ESTRAGON The Bible . . . [*He reflects.*] I must have taken a look at it.

VLADIMIR Do you remember the Gospels?

ESTRAGON I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea⁵ was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy.

VLADIMIR You should have been a poet.

ESTRAGON I was. [*Gesture towards his rags.*] Isn't that obvious?
[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Where was I . . . How's your foot?

ESTRAGON Swelling visibly.

VLADIMIR Ah yes, the two thieves. Do you remember the story?

ESTRAGON No.

VLADIMIR Shall I tell it to you?

ESTRAGON No.

VLADIMIR It'll pass the time. [*Pause.*] Two thieves, crucified at the same time as our Saviour. One—

ESTRAGON Our what?

VLADIMIR Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other . . . [*he searches for the contrary of saved*] . . . damned.

ESTRAGON Saved from what?

VLADIMIR Hell.

ESTRAGON I'm going.
[*He does not move.*]

VLADIMIR And yet . . . [*pause*] . . . how is it—this is not boring you I hope—how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there—or thereabouts—and only one speaks of a thief being saved. [*Pause.*] Come on, Gogo, return the ball, can't you, once in a way?

ESTRAGON [*with exaggerated enthusiasm*] I find this really most extraordinarily interesting.

VLADIMIR One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.⁶

ESTRAGON Who?

VLADIMIR What?

ESTRAGON What's all this about? Abused who?

VLADIMIR The Saviour.

ESTRAGON Why?

VLADIMIR Because he wouldn't save them.

ESTRAGON From hell?

VLADIMIR Imbecile! From death.

ESTRAGON I thought you said hell.

VLADIMIR From death, from death.

ESTRAGON Well what of it?

VLADIMIR Then the two of them must have been damned.

ESTRAGON And why not?

VLADIMIR But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.

ESTRAGON Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.

VLADIMIR But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?

ESTRAGON Who believes him?

VLADIMIR Everybody. It's the only version they know.

ESTRAGON People are bloody ignorant apes.

[He rises painfully, goes limping to extreme left, halts, gazes into distance off with his hand screening his eyes, turns, goes to extreme right, gazes into distance, VLADIMIR watches him, then goes and picks up the boot, peers into it, drops it hastily.]

VLADIMIR Pah!

[He spits. ESTRAGON moves to center, halts with his back to auditorium.]

ESTRAGON Charming spot. *[He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.]* Inspiring prospects. *[He turns to VLADIMIR.]* Let's go.

VLADIMIR We can't.
ESTRAGON Why not?
VLADIMIR We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON [*despairingly*] Ah! [*Pause.*] You're sure it was here?
VLADIMIR What?
ESTRAGON That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR He said by the tree. [*They look at the tree.*] Do you
 see any others?
ESTRAGON What is it?
VLADIMIR I don't know. A willow.⁷
ESTRAGON Where are the leaves?
VLADIMIR It must be dead.
ESTRAGON No more weeping.
VLADIMIR Or perhaps it's not the season.
ESTRAGON Looks to me more like a bush.
VLADIMIR A shrub.
ESTRAGON A bush.
VLADIMIR A—. What are you insinuating? That we've come to
 the wrong place?
ESTRAGON He should be here.
VLADIMIR He didn't say for sure he'd come.
ESTRAGON And if he doesn't come?
VLADIMIR We'll come back tomorrow.
ESTRAGON And then the day after tomorrow.
VLADIMIR Possibly.
ESTRAGON And so on.
VLADIMIR The point is—
ESTRAGON Until he comes.
VLADIMIR You're merciless.
ESTRAGON We came here yesterday.
VLADIMIR Ah no, there you're mistaken.
ESTRAGON What did we do yesterday?
VLADIMIR What did we do yesterday?
ESTRAGON Yes.

VLADIMIR Why . . . [*Angrily.*] Nothing is certain when you're
about.

ESTRAGON In my opinion we were here.

VLADIMIR [*looking round*] You recognize the place?

ESTRAGON I didn't say that.

VLADIMIR Well?

ESTRAGON That makes no difference.

VLADIMIR All the same . . . that tree . . . [*turning towards auditorium*] that bog . . .

ESTRAGON You're sure it was this evening?

VLADIMIR What?

ESTRAGON That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR He said Saturday. [*Pause.*] I think.

ESTRAGON You think.

VLADIMIR I must have made a note of it. [*He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.*]

ESTRAGON [*very insidious*] But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? [*Pause.*] Or Monday? [*Pause.*] Or Friday?

VLADIMIR [*looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape*] It's not possible!

ESTRAGON Or Thursday?

VLADIMIR What'll we do?

ESTRAGON If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may
 be sure he won't come again today.

VLADIMIR But you say we were here yesterday.

ESTRAGON I may be mistaken. [*Pause.*] Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?

VLADIMIR [*feebly*] All right. [ESTRAGON *sits down on the mound.*

VLADIMIR *paces agitatedly to and fro, halting from time to time to gaze into distance off.* ESTRAGON *falls asleep.* VLADIMIR *halts finally before* ESTRAGON.] Gogo! . . . Gogo! . . . GOGO!

[ESTRAGON *wakes with a start.*]

ESTRAGON [*restored to the horror of his situation*] I was asleep!
[*Despairingly.*] Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON I had a dream.

VLADIMIR Don't tell me!

ESTRAGON I dreamt that—

VLADIMIR DON'T TELL ME!

ESTRAGON [*gesture towards the universe*] This one is enough for you? [*Silence.*] It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can't tell them to you?

VLADIMIR Let them remain private. You know I can't bear that.

ESTRAGON [*coldly*] There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better for us to part.

VLADIMIR You wouldn't go far.

ESTRAGON That would be too bad, really too bad. [*Pause.*]

Wouldn't it, Didi, be really too bad? [*Pause.*] When you think of the beauty of the way. [*Pause.*] And the goodness of the wayfarers. [*Pause. Wheedling.*] Wouldn't it, Didi?

VLADIMIR Calm yourself.

ESTRAGON [*voluptuously*] Calm . . . calm . . . The English say cawm. [*Pause.*] You know the story of the Englishman in the brothel?

VLADIMIR Yes.

ESTRAGON Tell it to me.

VLADIMIR Ah stop it!

ESTRAGON An Englishman having drunk a little more than usual proceeds to a brothel. The bawd asks him if he wants a fair one, a dark one or a red-haired one.⁸ Go on.

VLADIMIR STOP IT!

[*Exit VLADIMIR hurriedly. ESTRAGON gets up and follows him as far as the limit of the stage. Gestures of ESTRAGON like those of a spectator encouraging a pugilist.*⁹ Enter VLADIMIR. He brushes past ESTRAGON, crosses the stage with bowed head. ESTRAGON takes a step towards him, halts.]

ESTRAGON [*gently*] You wanted to speak to me? [*Silence.*

ESTRAGON *takes a step forward.*] You had something to say to me? [*Silence. Another step forward.*] Didi . . .

VLADIMIR [*without turning*] I've nothing to say to you.

ESTRAGON [*step forward*] You're angry? [*Silence. Step forward.*]
Forgive me. [*Silence. Step forward. ESTRAGON lays his hand on*
VLADIMIR *'s shoulder.*] Come, Didi. [*Silence.*] Give me your hand.
[VLADIMIR *half turns.*] Embrace me! [VLADIMIR *stiffens.*] Don't be
stubborn! [VLADIMIR *softens. They embrace. ESTRAGON recoils.*]
You stink of garlic!

VLADIMIR It's for the kidneys. [*Silence. ESTRAGON looks*
attentively at the tree.] What do we do now?

ESTRAGON Wait.

VLADIMIR Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

ESTRAGON [*highly excited*] An erection!

VLADIMIR With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow.
That's why they shriek when you pull them up.¹ Did you not
know that?

ESTRAGON Let's hang ourselves immediately!

VLADIMIR From a bough? [*They go towards the tree.*] I
wouldn't trust it.

ESTRAGON We can always try.

VLADIMIR Go ahead.

ESTRAGON After you.

VLADIMIR No no, you first.

ESTRAGON Why me?

VLADIMIR You're lighter than I am.

ESTRAGON Just so!

VLADIMIR I don't understand.

ESTRAGON Use your intelligence, can't you?
[VLADIMIR *uses his intelligence.*]

VLADIMIR [*finally*] I remain in the dark.

ESTRAGON This is how it is. [*He reflects.*] The bough . . . the
bough . . .
[*Angrily.*] Use your head, can't you?

VLADIMIR You're my only hope.

ESTRAGON [*with effort*] Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi heavy—bough break—Didi alone. Whereas—

VLADIMIR I hadn't thought of that.

ESTRAGON If it hangs you it'll hang anything.

VLADIMIR But am I heavier than you?

ESTRAGON So you tell me. I don't know. There's an even chance. Or nearly.

VLADIMIR Well? What do we do?

ESTRAGON Don't let's do anything. It's safer.

VLADIMIR Let's wait and see what he says.

ESTRAGON Who?

VLADIMIR Godot.

ESTRAGON Good idea.

VLADIMIR Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

ESTRAGON On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.²

VLADIMIR I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.

ESTRAGON What exactly did we ask him for?

VLADIMIR Were you not there?

ESTRAGON I can't have been listening.

VLADIMIR Oh . . . Nothing very definite.

ESTRAGON A kind of prayer.

VLADIMIR Precisely.

ESTRAGON A vague supplication.

VLADIMIR Exactly.

ESTRAGON And what did he reply?

VLADIMIR That he'd see.

ESTRAGON That he couldn't promise anything.

VLADIMIR That he'd have to think it over.

ESTRAGON In the quiet of his home.

VLADIMIR Consult his family.

ESTRAGON His friends.

VLADIMIR His agents.

ESTRAGON His correspondents.

VLADIMIR His books.
ESTRAGON His bank account.
VLADIMIR Before taking³ a decision.
ESTRAGON It's the normal thing.
VLADIMIR Is it not?
ESTRAGON I think it is.
VLADIMIR I think so too.
[*Silence.*]
ESTRAGON [*anxious*] And we?
VLADIMIR I beg your pardon?
ESTRAGON I said, And we?
VLADIMIR I don't understand.
ESTRAGON Where do we come in?
VLADIMIR Come in?
ESTRAGON Take your time.
VLADIMIR Come in? On our hands and knees.
ESTRAGON As bad as that?
VLADIMIR Your Worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?
ESTRAGON We've no rights any more?
[*Laugh of VLADIMIR, stifled as before, less the smile.*]
VLADIMIR You'd make me laugh if it wasn't prohibited.
ESTRAGON We've lost our rights?
VLADIMIR [*distinctly*] We got rid of them.
[*Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.*]
ESTRAGON [*feebly*] We're not tied? [*Pause.*] We're not—
VLADIMIR Listen!
[*They listen, grotesquely rigid.*]
ESTRAGON I hear nothing.
VLADIMIR Hsst! [*They listen. ESTRAGON loses his balance, almost falls. He clutches the arm of VLADIMIR, who totters. They listen, huddled together.*] Nor I.
[*Sighs of relief. They relax and separate.*]
ESTRAGON You gave me a fright.
VLADIMIR I thought it was he.

ESTRAGON Who?

VLADIMIR Godot.

ESTRAGON Pah! The wind in the reeds.

VLADIMIR I could have sworn I heard shouts.

ESTRAGON And why would he shout?

VLADIMIR At his horse.

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON [*violently*] I'm hungry!

VLADIMIR Do you want a carrot?

ESTRAGON Is that all there is?

VLADIMIR I might have some turnips.

ESTRAGON Give me a carrot. [VLADIMIR *rummages in his pockets, takes out a turnip and gives it to* ESTRAGON *who takes a bite out of it. Angrily.*] It's a turnip!

VLADIMIR Oh pardon! I could have sworn it was a carrot. [*He rummages again in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips.*] All that's turnips. [*He rummages.*] You must have eaten the last. [*He rummages.*] Wait, I have it. [*He brings out a carrot and gives it to* ESTRAGON.] There, dear fellow. [ESTRAGON *wipes the carrot on his sleeve and begins to eat it.*] Make it last, that's the end of them.

ESTRAGON [*chewing*] I asked you a question.

VLADIMIR Ah.

ESTRAGON Did you reply?

VLADIMIR How's the carrot?

ESTRAGON It's a carrot.

VLADIMIR So much the better, so much the better. [*Pause.*]

What was it you wanted to know?

ESTRAGON I've forgotten. [*Chews.*] That's what annoys me. [*He looks at the carrot appreciatively, dangles it between finger and thumb.*] I'll never forget this carrot. [*He sucks the end of it meditatively.*] Ah yes, now I remember.

VLADIMIR Well?

ESTRAGON [*his mouth full, vacuously*] We're not tied?

VLADIMIR I don't hear a word you're saying.

ESTRAGON [*chews, swallows*] I'm asking you if we're tied.

VLADIMIR Tied?
ESTRAGON Ti-ed.
VLADIMIR How do you mean tied?
ESTRAGON Down.
VLADIMIR But to whom? By whom?
ESTRAGON To your man.
VLADIMIR To Godot? Tied to Godot! What an idea! No question of it. [*Pause.*] For the moment.
ESTRAGON His name is Godot?
VLADIMIR I think so.
ESTRAGON Fancy that. [*He raises what remains of the carrot by the stub of leaf, twirls it before his eyes.*] Funny, the more you eat the worse it gets.
VLADIMIR With me it's just the opposite.
ESTRAGON In other words?
VLADIMIR I get used to the muck as I go along.
ESTRAGON [*after prolonged reflection*] Is that the opposite?
VLADIMIR Question of temperament.
ESTRAGON Of character.
VLADIMIR Nothing you can do about it.
ESTRAGON No use struggling.
VLADIMIR One is what one is.
ESTRAGON No use wriggling.
VLADIMIR The essential doesn't change.
ESTRAGON Nothing to be done. [*He proffers the remains of the carrot to VLADIMIR.*] Like to finish it?
[*A terrible cry, close at hand. ESTRAGON drops the carrot. They remain motionless, then together make a sudden rush towards the wings. ESTRAGON stops halfway, runs back, picks up the carrot, stuffs it in his pocket, runs to rejoin VLADIMIR who is waiting for him, stops again, runs back, picks up his boot, runs to rejoin VLADIMIR. Huddled together, shoulders hunched, cringing away from the menace, they wait.*]

[Enter POZZO and LUCKY. POZZO drives LUCKY by means of a rope passed round his neck, so that LUCKY is the first to enter, followed by the rope which is long enough to let him reach the middle of the stage before POZZO appears. LUCKY carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat,⁴ POZZO a whip.]

POZZO *[off]* On! *[Crack of whip. POZZO appears. They cross the stage. LUCKY passes before VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON and exit.*

POZZO at the sight of VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON stops short. The rope tautens. POZZO jerks at it violently.] Back!

[Noise of LUCKY falling with all his baggage. VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON turn towards him, half wishing half fearing to go to his assistance. VLADIMIR takes a step towards Lucky, ESTRAGON holds him back by the sleeve.]

VLADIMIR Let me go!

ESTRAGON Stay where you are!

POZZO Be careful! He's wicked. *[VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON turn towards POZZO.]* With strangers.

ESTRAGON *[undertone]* Is that him?

VLADIMIR Who?

ESTRAGON *[trying to remember the name]* Er . . .

VLADIMIR Godot?

ESTRAGON Yes.

POZZO I present myself: Pozzo.

VLADIMIR *[to ESTRAGON]* Not at all!

ESTRAGON He said Godot.

VLADIMIR Not at all!

ESTRAGON *[timidly, to POZZO]* You're not Mr. Godot, Sir?

POZZO *[terrifying voice]* I am Pozzo! *[Silence.]* Pozzo! *[Silence.]*

Does that name mean nothing to you? *[Silence.]* I say does that name mean nothing to you?

[VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON look at each other questioningly.]

ESTRAGON *[pretending to search]* Bozzo . . . Bozzo . . .

VLADIMIR *[ditto]* Pozzo . . . Pozzo . . .

POZZO PPPOZZZO!

ESTRAGON Ah! Pozzo . . . let me see . . . Pozzo . . .

VLADIMIR Is it Pozzo or Bozzo?

ESTRAGON Pozzo . . . no . . . I'm afraid I . . . no . . . I don't seem to . . . [POZZO *advances threateningly.*]

VLADIMIR [*conciliating*] I once knew a family called Cozzo. The mother had the clap.⁵

ESTRAGON [*hastily*] We're not from these parts, Sir.

POZZO [*halting*] You are human beings none the less. [*He puts on his glasses.*] As far as one can see. [*He takes off his glasses.*] Of the same species as myself. [*He bursts into an enormous laugh.*] Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image!

VLADIMIR Well you see—

POZZO [*peremptory*] Who is Godot?

ESTRAGON Godot?

POZZO You took me for Godot.

VLADIMIR Oh no, Sir, not for an instant, Sir.

POZZO Who is he?

VLADIMIR Oh he's a . . . he's a kind of acquaintance.

ESTRAGON Nothing of the kind, we hardly know him.

VLADIMIR True . . . we don't know him very well . . . but all the same . . .

ESTRAGON Personally I wouldn't even know him if I saw him.

POZZO You took me for him.

ESTRAGON [*recoiling before POZZO*] That's to say . . . you understand . . . the dusk . . . the strain . . . waiting . . . I confess . . . I imagined . . . for a second . . .

POZZO Waiting? So you were waiting for him?

VLADIMIR Well you see—

POZZO Here? On my land?

VLADIMIR We didn't intend any harm.

ESTRAGON We meant well.

POZZO The road is free to all.

VLADIMIR That's how we looked at it.

POZZO It's a disgrace. But there you are.

ESTRAGON Nothing we can do about it.

POZZO [*with magnanimous gesture*] Let's say no more about it.

[*He jerks the rope.*] Up pig! [*Pause.*] Every time he drops he

falls asleep. [*Jerks the rope.*] Up hog! [*Noise of LUCKY getting*

up and picking up his baggage. POZZO jerks the rope.] Back!

[*Enter LUCKY backwards.*] Stop! [*LUCKY stops.*] Turn! [*LUCKY*

turns. To VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON, affably.] Gentlemen, I am

happy to have met you. [*Before their incredulous expression.*]

Yes yes, sincerely happy. [*He jerks the rope.*] Closer! [*LUCKY*

advances.] Stop! [*LUCKY stops.*] Yes, the road seems long

when one journeys all alone for . . . [*he consults his watch*] . . .

. yes . . . [*he calculates*] . . . yes, six hours, that's right, six

hours on end, and never a soul in sight. [*To LUCKY.*] Coat!

[*LUCKY puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes*

back to his place, takes up the bag.] Hold that! [*POZZO holds*

out the whip. LUCKY advances and, both his hands being

occupied, takes the whip in his mouth, then goes back to his

place. POZZO begins to put on his coat, stops.] Coat! [*LUCKY puts*

down the bag, basket and stool, helps POZZO on with his coat,

goes back to his place and takes up bag, basket and stool.]

Touch of autumn in the air this evening. [*POZZO finishes*

buttoning his coat, stoops, inspects himself, straightens up.]

Whip! [*LUCKY advances, stoops, POZZO snatches the whip from*

his mouth, LUCKY goes back to his place.] Yes, gentlemen, I

cannot go for long without the society of my likes [*he puts on*

his glasses and looks at the two likes] even when the likeness

is an imperfect one. [*He takes off his glasses.*] Stool! [*LUCKY*

puts down bag and basket, advances, opens stool, puts it

down, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.]

Closer! [*LUCKY puts down bag and basket, advances, moves*

stool, goes back to his place, takes up bag and basket.

POZZO sits down, places the butt of his whip against LUCKY's

chest and pushes.] Back! [*LUCKY takes a step back.*] Further!

[*LUCKY takes another step back.*] Stop! [*LUCKY stops. To*

VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON.] That is why, with your permission, I

propose to dally with you a moment, before I venture any

further. Basket! [LUCKY *advances, gives the basket, goes back to his place.*] The fresh air stimulates the jaded appetite. [He opens the basket, takes out a piece of chicken and a bottle of wine.] Basket! [LUCKY *advances, picks up the basket and goes back to his place.*] Further! [LUCKY *takes a step back.*] He stinks. Happy days!

[He drinks from the bottle, puts it down and begins to eat. Silence. VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON, cautiously at first, then more boldly, begin to circle about LUCKY, inspecting him up and down. POZZO eats his chicken voraciously, throwing away the bones after having sucked them. LUCKY sags slowly, until bag and basket touch the ground, then straightens up with a start and begins to sag again. Rhythm of one sleeping on his feet.]

ESTRAGON What ails him?

VLADIMIR He looks tired.

ESTRAGON Why doesn't he put down his bags?

VLADIMIR How do I know? [They close in on him.] Careful!

ESTRAGON Say something to him.

VLADIMIR Look!

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR [*pointing*] His neck!

ESTRAGON [*looking at the neck*] I see nothing.

VLADIMIR Here.

[ESTRAGON *goes over beside VLADIMIR.*]

ESTRAGON Oh I say!

VLADIMIR A running sore!⁶

ESTRAGON It's the rope.

VLADIMIR It's the rubbing.

ESTRAGON It's inevitable.

VLADIMIR It's the knot.

ESTRAGON It's the chafing.

[They resume their inspection, dwell on the face.]

VLADIMIR [*grudgingly*] He's not bad looking.

ESTRAGON [*shrugging his shoulders, wry face*] Would you say so?

VLADIMIR A trifle effeminate.

ESTRAGON Look at the slobber.

VLADIMIR It's inevitable.

ESTRAGON Look at the slaver.⁷

VLADIMIR Perhaps he's a halfwit.

ESTRAGON A cretin.

VLADIMIR [*looking closer*] Looks like a goiter.⁸

ESTRAGON [*ditto*] It's not certain.

VLADIMIR He's panting.

ESTRAGON It's inevitable.

VLADIMIR And his eyes!

ESTRAGON What about them?

VLADIMIR Goggling out of his head.

ESTRAGON Looks at his last gasp to me.

VLADIMIR It's not certain. [*Pause.*] Ask him a question.

ESTRAGON Would that be a good thing?

VLADIMIR What do we risk?

ESTRAGON [*timidly*] Mister . . .

VLADIMIR Louder.

ESTRAGON [*louder*] Mister . . .

POZZO Leave him in peace! [*They turn towards POZZO who, having finished eating, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.*] Can't you see he wants to rest? Basket! [*He strikes a match and begins to light his pipe.* ESTRAGON *sees the chicken bones on the ground and stares at them greedily. As LUCKY does not move POZZO throws the match angrily away and jerks the rope.*] Basket! [*LUCKY starts, almost falls, recovers his senses, advances, puts the bottle in the basket and goes back to his place.* ESTRAGON *stares at the bones.* POZZO *strikes another match and lights his pipe.*] What can you expect, it's not his job. [*He pulls at his pipe, stretches out his legs.*] Ah! That's better.

ESTRAGON [*timidly*] Please Sir . . .

POZZO What is it, my good man?

ESTRAGON Er . . . you've finished with the . . . er . . . you don't need the . . . er . . . bones, Sir?

VLADIMIR [*scandalized*] You couldn't have waited?

POZZO No no, he does well to ask. Do I need the bones? [*He turns them over with the end of his whip.*] No, personally I do not need them any more. [ESTRAGON *takes a step towards the bones.*] But . . . [ESTRAGON *stops short.*] . . . but in theory the bones go to the carrier. He is therefore the one to ask. [ESTRAGON *turns towards LUCKY, hesitates.*] Go on, go on, don't be afraid, ask him, he'll tell you.

[ESTRAGON *goes towards LUCKY, stops before him.*]

ESTRAGON Mister . . . excuse me, Mister . . .

POZZO You're being spoken to, pig! Reply! [*To ESTRAGON.*] Try him again.

ESTRAGON Excuse me, Mister, the bones, you won't be wanting the bones?

[LUCKY *looks long at ESTRAGON.*]

POZZO [*in raptures*] Mister! [LUCKY *bows his head.*] Reply! Do you want them or don't you? [*Silence of LUCKY. To ESTRAGON.*] They're yours. [ESTRAGON *makes a dart at the bones, picks them up and begins to gnaw them.*] I don't like it. I've never known him refuse a bone before. [*He looks anxiously at LUCKY.*] Nice business it'd be if he fell sick on me! [*He puffs at his pipe.*]

VLADIMIR [*exploding*] It's a scandal!

[*Silence. Flabbergasted, ESTRAGON stops gnawing, looks at POZZO and VLADIMIR in turn. POZZO outwardly calm. VLADIMIR embarrassed.*]

POZZO [*to VLADIMIR*] Are you alluding to anything in particular?

VLADIMIR [*stutteringly resolute*] To treat a man . . . [*Gesture towards LUCKY*] . . . like that . . . I think that . . . no . . . a human being . . . no . . . it's a scandal!

ESTRAGON [*not to be outdone*] A disgrace! [*He resumes his gnawing.*]

POZZO You are severe. [*To VLADIMIR.*] What age are you, if it's not a rude question? [*Silence.*] Sixty? Seventy? [*To ESTRAGON.*] What age would you say he was?

ESTRAGON Eleven.

POZZO I am impertinent. [*He knocks out his pipe against the whip, gets up.*] I must be getting on. Thank you for your society. [*He reflects.*] Unless I smoke another pipe before I go. What do you say? [*They say nothing.*] Oh I'm only a small smoker, a very small smoker, I'm not in the habit of smoking two pipes one on top of the other, it makes [*hand to heart, sighing*] my heart go pit-a-pat. [*Silence.*] It's the nicotine, one absorbs it in spite of one's precautions. [*Sighs.*] You know how it is. [*Silence.*] But perhaps you don't smoke? Yes? No? It's of no importance. [*Silence.*] But how am I to sit down now, without affectation, now that I have risen? Without appearing to—how shall I say—without appearing to falter. [*To VLADIMIR.*] I beg your pardon? [*Silence.*] Perhaps you didn't speak? [*Silence.*] It's of no importance. Let me see . . . [*He reflects.*]

ESTRAGON Ah! That's better. [*He puts the bones in his pocket.*]

VLADIMIR Let's go.

ESTRAGON So soon?

POZZO One moment! [*He jerks the rope.*] Stool! [*He points with his whip. LUCKY moves the stool.*] More! There! [*He sits down. LUCKY goes back to his place.*] Done it! [*He fills his pipe.*]

VLADIMIR [*vehemently*] Let's go!

POZZO I hope I'm not driving you away. Wait a little longer, you'll never regret it.

ESTRAGON [*scenting charity*] We're in no hurry.

POZZO [*having lit his pipe*] The second is never so sweet . . . [*he takes the pipe out of his mouth, contemplates it*] . . . as the first I mean. [*He puts the pipe back in his mouth.*] But it's sweet just the same.

VLADIMIR I'm going.

POZZO He can no longer endure my presence. I am perhaps not particularly human, but who cares? [*To VLADIMIR.*] Think twice before you do anything rash. Suppose you go now while it is still day, for there is no denying it is still day. [*They all look up at the sky.*] Good. [*They stop looking at the sky.*] What happens in that case—[*he takes the pipe out of his mouth, examines it*—I'm out—[*he relights his pipe*—in that case—[*puff*—in that case—[*puff*—what happens in that case to your appointment with this . . . Godet . . . Godot . . . Godin . . . anyhow you see who I mean, who has your future in his hands . . . [*pause*] . . . at least your immediate future?

VLADIMIR Who told you?

POZZO He speaks to me again! If this goes on much longer we'll soon be old friends.

ESTRAGON Why doesn't he put down his bags?

POZZO I too would be happy to meet him. The more people I meet the happier I become. From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one's blessings. Even you . . . [*he looks at them ostentatiously in turn to make it clear they are both meant*] . . . even you, who knows, will have added to my store.

ESTRAGON Why doesn't he put down his bags?

POZZO But that would surprise me.

VLADIMIR You're being asked a question.

POZZO [*delighted*] A question! Who? What? A moment ago you were calling me Sir, in fear and trembling. Now you're asking me questions. No good will come of this!

VLADIMIR [*to ESTRAGON*] I think he's listening.

ESTRAGON [*circling about LUCKY*] What?

VLADIMIR You can ask him now. He's on the alert.

ESTRAGON Ask him what?

VLADIMIR Why he doesn't put down his bags.

ESTRAGON I wonder.

VLADIMIR Ask him, can't you?

POZZO [*who has followed these exchanges with anxious attention, fearing lest the question get lost*] You want to

know why he doesn't put down his bags, as you call them.

VLADIMIR That's it.

POZZO [*to* ESTRAGON] You are sure you agree with that?

ESTRAGON He's puffing like a grampus.⁹

POZZO The answer is this. [*To* ESTRAGON.] But stay still, I beg of you, you're making me nervous!

VLADIMIR Here.

ESTRAGON What is it?

VLADIMIR He's about to speak.

[ESTRAGON *goes over beside* VLADIMIR. *Motionless, side by side, they wait.*]

POZZO Good. Is everybody ready? Is everybody looking at me? [*He looks at* LUCKY, *jerks the rope.* LUCKY *raises his head.*] Will you look at me, pig! [LUCKY *looks at him.*] Good. [*He puts the pipe in his pocket, takes out a little vaporizer and sprays his throat, puts back the vaporizer in his pocket, clears his throat, spits, takes out the vaporizer again, sprays his throat again, puts back the vaporizer in his pocket.*] I am ready. Is everybody listening? Is everybody ready? [*He looks at them all in turn, jerks the rope.*] Hog! [LUCKY *raises his head.*] I don't like talking in a vacuum. Good. Let me see. [*He reflects.*]

ESTRAGON I'm going.

POZZO What was it exactly you wanted to know?

VLADIMIR Why he—

POZZO [*angrily*] Don't interrupt me! [*Pause. Calmer.*] If we all speak at once we'll never get anywhere. [*Pause.*] What was I saying? [*Pause. Louder.*] What was I saying?

[VLADIMIR *mimics one carrying a heavy burden,* POZZO *looks at him, puzzled.*]

ESTRAGON [*forcibly*] Bags. [*He points at* LUCKY.] Why? Always hold. [*He sags, panting.*] Never put down. [*He opens his hands, straightens up with relief.*] Why?

POZZO Ah! Why couldn't you say so before? Why he doesn't make himself comfortable? Let's try and get this clear. Has he

not the right to? Certainly he has. It follows that he doesn't want to. There's reasoning for you. And why doesn't he want to? [*Pause.*] Gentlemen, the reason is this.

VLADIMIR [*to* ESTRAGON] Make a note of this.

POZZO He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him.

ESTRAGON What?

POZZO Perhaps I haven't got it quite right. He wants to mollify me, so that I'll give up the idea of parting with him. No, that's not exactly it either.

VLADIMIR You want to get rid of him?

POZZO He wants to cod¹ me, but he won't.

VLADIMIR You want to get rid of him?

POZZO He imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity.

ESTRAGON You've had enough of him?

POZZO In reality he carries like a pig. It's not his job.

VLADIMIR You want to get rid of him?

POZZO He imagines that when I see him indefatigable I'll regret my decision. Such is his miserable scheme. As though I were short of slaves! [*All three look at* LUCKY.] Atlas, son of Jupiter!² [*Silence.*] Well, that's that I think. Anything else?

[*Vaporizer.*]

VLADIMIR You want to get rid of him?

POZZO Remark that I might just as well have been in his shoes and he in mine. If chance had not willed otherwise. To each one his due.

VLADIMIR You waagerrim?

POZZO I beg your pardon?

VLADIMIR You want to get rid of him?

POZZO I do. But instead of driving him away as I might have done, I mean instead of simply kicking him out on his arse, in the goodness of my heart I am bringing him to the fair, where I hope to get a good price for him. The truth is you can't drive such creatures away. The best thing would be to kill them.

[LUCKY *weeps.*]

ESTRAGON He's crying!

POZZO Old dogs have more dignity. [*He proffers his handkerchief to ESTRAGON.*] Comfort him, since you pity him.

[ESTRAGON *hesitates.*] Come on. [ESTRAGON *takes the handkerchief.*] Wipe away his tears, he'll feel less forsaken.

[ESTRAGON *hesitates.*]

VLADIMIR Here, give it to me, I'll do it.

[ESTRAGON *refuses to give the handkerchief. Childish gestures.*]

POZZO Make haste, before he stops. [ESTRAGON *approaches LUCKY and makes to wipe his eyes. LUCKY kicks him violently in the shins. ESTRAGON drops the handkerchief, recoils, staggers about the stage howling with pain.*] Hanky!

[LUCKY *puts down bag and basket, picks up handkerchief and gives it to POZZO, goes back to his place, picks up bag and basket.*]

ESTRAGON Oh the swine! [*He pulls up the leg of his trousers.*] He's crippled me!

POZZO I told you he didn't like strangers.

VLADIMIR [*to ESTRAGON*] Show. [ESTRAGON *shows his leg. To POZZO, angrily*] He's bleeding!

POZZO It's a good sign.

ESTRAGON [*on one leg*] I'll never walk again!

VLADIMIR [*tenderly*] I'll carry you. [*Pause.*] If necessary.

POZZO He's stopped crying. [*To ESTRAGON.*] You have replaced him as it were. [*Lyrically.*] The tears of the world are a constant quantity. For each one who begins to weep, somewhere else another stops. The same is true of the laugh. [*He laughs.*] Let us not then speak ill of our generation, it is not any unhappier than its predecessors. [*Pause.*] Let us not speak well of it either. [*Pause.*] Let us not speak of it at all. [*Pause. Judiciously.*] It is true the population has increased.

VLADIMIR Try and walk.

[ESTRAGON *takes a few limping steps, stops before LUCKY and spits on him, then goes and sits down on the*

mound.]

POZZO Guess who taught me all these beautiful things. [*Pause. Pointing to* LUCKY.] My Lucky!

VLADIMIR [*looking at the sky*] Will night never come?

POZZO But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things. [*Pause. With extraordinary vehemence.*] Professional worries! [*Calmer.*] Beauty, grace, truth of the first water,³ I knew they were all beyond me. So I took a knook.⁴

VLADIMIR [*startled from his inspection of the sky*] A knook?

POZZO That was nearly sixty years ago . . . [*he consults his watch*] . . . yes, nearly sixty. [*Drawing himself up proudly.*] You wouldn't think it to look at me, would you? Compared to him I look like a young man, no? [*Pause.*] Hat! [*LUCKY puts down the basket and takes off his hat. His long white hair falls about his face. He puts his hat under his arm and picks up the basket.*] Now look. [*POZZO takes off his hat.*⁵ *He is completely bald. He puts on his hat again.*] Did you see?

VLADIMIR And now you turn him away? Such an old and faithful servant!

ESTRAGON Swine!

[POZZO more and more agitated.]

VLADIMIR After having sucked all the good out of him you chuck him away like a . . . like a banana skin. Really . . .

POZZO [*groaning, clutching his head*] I can't bear it . . . any longer . . . the way he goes on . . . you've no idea . . . it's terrible . . . he must go . . . [*he waves his arms*] . . . I'm going mad . . . [*he collapses, his head in his hands*] . . . I can't bear it . . . any longer . . .

[Silence. All look at POZZO.]

VLADIMIR He can't bear it.

ESTRAGON Any longer.

VLADIMIR He's going mad.

ESTRAGON It's terrible.

VLADIMIR [*to* LUCKY] How dare you! It's abominable! Such a good master! Crucify him like that! After so many years! Really!

POZZO [*sobbing*] He used to be so kind . . . so helpful . . . and entertaining . . . my good angel . . . and now . . . he's killing me.

ESTRAGON [*to* VLADIMIR] Does he want to replace him?

VLADIMIR What?

ESTRAGON Does he want someone to take his place or not?

VLADIMIR I don't think so.

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR I don't know.

ESTRAGON Ask him.

POZZO [*calmer*] Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. [*More and more his old self.*] I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it. [*Drawing himself up, striking his chest.*] Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer? Frankly? [*He rummages in his pockets.*] What have I done with my pipe?

VLADIMIR Charming evening we're having.

ESTRAGON Unforgettable.

VLADIMIR And it's not over.

ESTRAGON Apparently not.

VLADIMIR It's only beginning.

ESTRAGON It's awful.

VLADIMIR Worse than the pantomime.⁶

ESTRAGON The circus.

VLADIMIR The music-hall.⁷

ESTRAGON The circus.

POZZO What can I have done with that briar?

ESTRAGON He's a scream. He's lost his dudeen.⁸ [*Laughs noisily.*]

VLADIMIR I'll be back. [*He hastens towards the wings.*]

ESTRAGON End of the corridor, on the left.

VLADIMIR Keep my seat. [*Exit* VLADIMIR.]

POZZO [*on the point of tears*] I've lost my Kapp and Peterson!⁹

ESTRAGON [*convulsed with merriment*] He'll be the death of me!

POZZO You didn't see by any chance—. [*He misses VLADIMIR.*]

Oh! He's gone! Without saying goodbye! How could he! He might have waited!

ESTRAGON He would have burst.

POZZO Oh! [*Pause.*] Oh well then of course in that case . . .

ESTRAGON Come here.

POZZO What for?

ESTRAGON You'll see.

POZZO You want me to get up?

ESTRAGON Quick! [*POZZO gets up and goes over beside ESTRAGON.*

ESTRAGON points off.] Look!

POZZO [*having put on his glasses*] Oh I say!

ESTRAGON It's all over.

[*Enter VLADIMIR, somber. He shoulders LUCKY out of his way, kicks over the stool, comes and goes agitatedly.*]

POZZO He's not pleased.

ESTRAGON [*to VLADIMIR*] You missed a treat. Pity.

[*VLADIMIR halts, straightens the stool, comes and goes, calmer.*]

POZZO He subsides. [*Looking round.*] Indeed all subsides. A great calm descends. [*Raising his hand.*] Listen! Pan sleeps.¹

VLADIMIR Will night never come?

[*All three look at the sky.*]

POZZO You don't feel like going until it does?

ESTRAGON Well you see—

POZZO Why it's very natural, very natural. I myself in your situation, if I had an appointment with a Godin . . . Godet . . . Godot . . . anyhow you see who I mean, I'd wait till it was black night before I gave up. [*He looks at the stool.*] I'd very much like to sit down, but I don't quite know how to go about it.

ESTRAGON Could I be of any help?

POZZO If you asked me perhaps.

ESTRAGON What?

POZZO If you asked me to sit down.

ESTRAGON Would that be a help?

POZZO I fancy so.

ESTRAGON Here we go. Be seated, Sir, I beg of you.

POZZO No no, I wouldn't think of it! [*Pause. Aside.*] Ask me again.

ESTRAGON Come come, take a seat I beseech you, you'll get pneumonia.

POZZO You really think so?

ESTRAGON Why it's absolutely certain.

POZZO No doubt you are right. [*He sits down.*] Done it again! [*Pause.*] Thank you, dear fellow. [*He consults his watch.*] But I must really be getting along, if I am to observe my schedule.

VLADIMIR Time has stopped.

POZZO [*cuddling his watch to his ear*] Don't you believe it, Sir, don't you believe it. [*He puts his watch back in his pocket.*] Whatever you like, but not that.

ESTRAGON [*to POZZO*] Everything seems black to him today.

POZZO Except the firmament.² [*He laughs, pleased with this witticism.*] But I see what it is, you are not from these parts, you don't know what our twilights can do. Shall I tell you? [*Silence. ESTRAGON is fiddling with his boot again, VLADIMIR with his hat.*] I can't refuse you. [*Vaporizer.*] A little attention, if you please. [*VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON continue their fiddling, LUCKY is half asleep. POZZO cracks his whip feebly.*] What's the matter with this whip? [*He gets up and cracks it more vigorously, finally with success. LUCKY jumps. VLADIMIR's hat, ESTRAGON's boot, LUCKY's hat, fall to the ground. POZZO throws down the whip.*] Worn out, this whip. [*He looks at VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON.*] What was I saying?

VLADIMIR Let's go.

ESTRAGON But take the weight off your feet, I implore you, you'll catch your death.

POZZO True. [*He sits down. To ESTRAGON.*] What is your name?

ESTRAGON Adam.

POZZO [*who hasn't listened*] Ah yes! The night. [*He raises his head.*] But be a little more attentive, for pity's sake, otherwise we'll never get anywhere. [*He looks at the sky.*] Look! [*All look at the sky except LUCKY who is dozing off again. POZZO jerks the rope.*] Will you look at the sky, pig! [*LUCKY looks at the sky.*] Good, that's enough. [*They stop looking at the sky.*] What is there so extraordinary about it? Qua sky.³ It is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day. [*Pause.*] In these latitudes. [*Pause.*] When the weather is fine. [*Lyrical.*] An hour ago [*he looks at his watch, prosaic*] roughly [*lyrical*] after having poured forth even since [*he hesitates, prosaic*] say ten o'clock in the morning [*lyrical*] tirelessly torrents of red and white light it begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale [*gesture of the two hands lapsing by stages*] pale, ever a little paler, a little paler until [*dramatic pause, ample gesture of the two hands flung wide apart*] pppfff! finished! it comes to rest. But—[*hand raised in admonition*—but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging [*vibrantly*] and will burst upon us [*snaps his fingers.*] pop! like that! [*His inspiration leaves him.*] just when we least expect it. [*Silence. Gloomily.*] That's how it is on this bitch of an earth.

[*Long silence.*]

ESTRAGON So long as one knows.

VLADIMIR One can bide one's time.

ESTRAGON One knows what to expect.

VLADIMIR No further need to worry.

ESTRAGON Simply wait.

VLADIMIR We're used to it. [*He picks up his hat, peers inside it, shakes it, puts it on.*]

POZZO How did you find me? [*VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON look at him blankly.*] Good? Fair? Middling? Poor? Positively bad?

VLADIMIR [*first to understand*] Oh very good, very very good.

POZZO [*to ESTRAGON*] And you, Sir?

ESTRAGON Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong.⁴

POZZO [*fervently*] Bless you, gentlemen, bless you! [*Pause.*] I have such need of encouragement! [*Pause.*] I weakened a little towards the end, you didn't notice?

VLADIMIR Oh perhaps just a teeny weeny little bit.

ESTRAGON I thought it was intentional.

POZZO You see my memory is defective.

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON In the meantime nothing happens.

POZZO You find it tedious?

ESTRAGON Somewhat.

POZZO [*to* VLADIMIR] And you, Sir?

VLADIMIR I've been better entertained.

[*Silence.* POZZO *struggles inwardly.*]

POZZO Gentlemen, you have been . . . civil to me.

ESTRAGON Not at all!

VLADIMIR What an idea!

POZZO Yes yes, you have been correct. So that I ask myself is there anything I can do in my turn for these honest fellows who are having such a dull, dull time.

ESTRAGON Even ten francs⁵ would be a help.

VLADIMIR We are not beggars!

POZZO Is there anything I can do, that's what I ask myself, to cheer them up? I have given them bones, I have talked to them about this and that, I have explained the twilight, admittedly. But is it enough, that's what tortures me, is it enough?

ESTRAGON Even five.

VLADIMIR [*to* ESTRAGON, *indignantly*] That's enough!

ESTRAGON I couldn't accept less.

POZZO Is it enough? No doubt. But I am liberal. It's my nature.

This evening. So much the worse for me. [*He jerks the rope.*

LUCKY *looks at him.*] For I shall suffer, no doubt about that.

[*He picks up the whip.*] What do you prefer? Shall we have

him dance, or sing, or recite, or think, or—

ESTRAGON Who?

POZZO Who! You know how to think, you two?

VLADIMIR He thinks?

POZZO Certainly. Aloud. He even used to think very prettily once, I could listen to him for hours. Now . . . [*He shudders.*] So much the worse for me. Well, would you like him to think something for us?

ESTRAGON I'd rather he'd dance, it'd be more fun.

POZZO Not necessarily.

ESTRAGON Wouldn't it, Didi, be more fun?

VLADIMIR I'd like well to hear him think.

ESTRAGON Perhaps he could dance first and think afterwards, if it isn't too much to ask him.

VLADIMIR [*to POZZO*] Would that be possible?

POZZO By all means, nothing simpler. It's the natural order. [*He laughs briefly.*]

VLADIMIR Then let him dance.

[*Silence.*]

POZZO Do you hear, hog?

ESTRAGON He never refuses?

POZZO He refused once. [*Silence.*] Dance, misery!

[*LUCKY puts down bag and basket, advances towards front, turns to POZZO. LUCKY dances. He stops.*]

ESTRAGON Is that all?

POZZO Encore!

[*LUCKY executes the same movements, stops.*]

ESTRAGON Pooh! I'd do as well myself. [*He imitates LUCKY, almost falls.*] With a little practice.

POZZO He used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango and even the hornpipe.⁶ He capered. For joy. Now that's the best he can do. Do you know what he calls it?

ESTRAGON The Scapegoat's Agony.

VLADIMIR The Hard Stool.

POZZO The Net. He thinks he's entangled in a net.

VLADIMIR [*squirming like an aesthete*] There's something about it . . .

[LUCKY *makes to return to his burdens.*]

POZZO Woaa!

[LUCKY *stiffens.*]

ESTRAGON Tell us about the time he refused.

POZZO With pleasure, with pleasure. [*He fumbles in his pockets.*] Wait. [*He fumbles.*] What have I done with my spray? [*He fumbles.*] Well now isn't that . . . [*He looks up, consternation on his features. Faintly.*] I can't find my pulverizer!⁷

ESTRAGON [*faintly*] My left lung is very weak! [*He coughs feebly. In ringing tones.*] But my right lung is as sound as a bell!

POZZO [*normal voice*] No matter! What was I saying. [*He ponders.*] Wait.

[*Ponders.*] Well now isn't that . . . [*He raises his head.*]

Help me!

ESTRAGON Wait!

VLADIMIR Wait!

POZZO Wait!

[*All three take off their hats simultaneously, press their hands to their foreheads, concentrate.*]

ESTRAGON [*triumphantly*] Ah!

VLADIMIR He has it.

POZZO [*impatient*] Well?

ESTRAGON Why doesn't he put down his bags?

VLADIMIR Rubbish!

POZZO Are you sure?

VLADIMIR Damn it haven't you already told us?

POZZO I've already told you?

ESTRAGON He's already told us?

VLADIMIR Anyway he has put them down.

ESTRAGON [*glance at LUCKY*] So he has. And what of it?

VLADIMIR Since he has put down his bags it is impossible we should have asked why he does not do so.

POZZO Stoutly reasoned!

ESTRAGON And why has he put them down?

POZZO Answer us that.

VLADIMIR In order to dance.

ESTRAGON True!

POZZO True!

[Silence. They put on their hats.]

ESTRAGON Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!

VLADIMIR *[to POZZO]* Tell him to think.

POZZO Give him his hat.

VLADIMIR His hat?

POZZO He can't think without his hat.

VLADIMIR *[to ESTRAGON]* Give him his hat.

ESTRAGON Me! After what he did to me! Never!

VLADIMIR I'll give it to him. *[He does not move.]*

ESTRAGON *[to POZZO]* Tell him to go and fetch it.

POZZO It's better to give it to him.

VLADIMIR I'll give it to him.

[He picks up the hat and tenders it at arm's length to LUCKY, who does not move.]

POZZO You must put it on his head.

ESTRAGON *[to POZZO]* Tell him to take it.

POZZO It's better to put it on his head.

VLADIMIR I'll put it on his head.

[He goes round behind LUCKY, approaches him cautiously, puts the hat on his head and recoils smartly. LUCKY does not move. Silence.]

ESTRAGON What's he waiting for?

POZZO Stand back! *[VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON move away from LUCKY. POZZO jerks the rope, LUCKY looks at POZZO.]* Think, pig! *[Pause. LUCKY begins to dance.]* Stop! *[LUCKY stops.]* Forward! *[LUCKY advances.]* Stop! *[LUCKY stops.]* Think! *[Silence.]*

LUCKY On the other hand with regard to—

POZZO Stop! [LUCKY *stops.*] Back! [LUCKY *moves back.*] Stop!
[LUCKY *stops.*] Turn! [LUCKY *turns towards auditorium.*] Think!

LUCKY Given the existence as uttered forth in the public, works
of Puncher and Wattmann⁸ of a personal God quaquaquaqu⁹
with white beard quaquaquaqu outside time without
extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine
athambia divine aphasia¹ loves us dearly with some
exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and

[VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *all attention, POZZO dejected and
disgusted.*] suffers like the divine Miranda² with those who
for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment
plunged in fire whose fire flames if that continues and who
can doubt it will fire the firmament that is to say blast hell to
heaven so blue still and calm so calm with a calm which even
though intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast and
considering what is more that as a result of the labors left
unfinished crowned by the Acacacademy of
Anthropopopometry of Essy-in-Possy of Testew and ³ of
Testew and Cunard⁴ it is established beyond all doubt all
other doubt

[VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *begin to protest, POZZO's sufferings
increase.*] than that which clings to the labors of men that
as a result of the labors unfinished of Testew and Cunard it is
established as hereinafter but not so fast for reasons
unknown that as a result of the public works of Puncher and
Wattmann it is established beyond all doubt that in view of
the labors of Fartov and Belcher⁵ left unfinished for reasons
unknown of Testew and Cunard left unfinished it is
established what many deny that man in Possy of Testew and
Cunard that man in Essy that man in short that man in brief
in spite of the strides of alimentation⁶ and defecation wastes
and pines wastes and pines and

[VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *attentive again, POZZO more and more
agitated and groaning.*] concurrently simultaneously what is
more for reasons unknown in spite of the strides of physical

culture the practice of sports such as tennis football running
cycling swimming flying floating riding gliding conating
camogie⁷ skating tennis of all kinds dying flying sports of all
sorts autumn summer winter winter tennis of all kinds hockey
of all sorts penicillin and succedanea⁸ in a word I resume
flying gliding golf over nine and eighteen holes tennis of all
sorts in a word for reasons unknown in Feckham Peckham
Fulham Clapham⁹ namely concurrently simultaneously what is
more for reasons unknown but time will tell fades away I
resume Fulham Clapham in a word the dead loss per head
since the death of Bishop Berkeley¹ being to the tune of one
inch four ounce per head approximately by and large more or
less to the nearest

[VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *protest violently. POZZO jumps up, pulls on
the rope. General outcry. LUCKY pulls on the rope, staggers,
shouts his text. All three throw themselves on LUCKY who
struggles and shouts his text.*] decimal good measure
round figures stark naked in the stockinged feet in

Connemara² in a word for reasons unknown no matter what
matter the facts are there and considering what is more much
more grave that in the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and
Peterman³ it appears what is more much more grave that in
the light the light the light of the labors lost of Steinweg and
Peterman that in the plains in the mountains by the seas by
the rivers running water running fire the air is the same and
then the earth namely the air and then the earth in the great
cold the great dark the air and the earth abode of stones in
the great cold alas alas in the year of their Lord six hundred
and something the air the earth the sea the earth abode of
stones in the great deeps the great cold on sea on land and in
the air I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the tennis
the facts are there but time will tell I resume alas alas on on
in short in fine on on abode of stones who can doubt it I
resume but not so fast I resume the skull fading fading fading
and concurrently simultaneously what is more for reasons

unknown in spite of the tennis on on the beard the flames the
tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the
skull the skull the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the
labors abandoned left unfinished graver still abode of stones
in a word I resume alas alas abandoned unfinished the skull
the skull in Connemara in spite of the tennis the skull alas the
stones Cunard [*mêlée, final vociferations*] tennis . . . the
stones . . . so calm . . . Cunard . . . unfinished . . .

POZZO His hat!

[VLADIMIR *seizes LUCKY's hat. Silence of LUCKY. He falls.*
Silence. Panting of the victors.]

ESTRAGON Avenged!

[VLADIMIR *examines the hat, peers inside it.*]

POZZO Give me that! [*He snatches the hat from VLADIMIR,*
throws it on the ground, tramples on it.] There's an end to his
thinking!

VLADIMIR But will he be able to walk?

POZZO Walk or crawl! [*He kicks LUCKY.*] Up pig!

ESTRAGON Perhaps he's dead.

VLADIMIR You'll kill him.

POZZO Up scum! [*He jerks the rope.*] Help me!

VLADIMIR How?

POZZO Raise him up!

[VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *hoist LUCKY to his feet, support him*
an instant, then let him go. He falls.]

ESTRAGON He's doing it on purpose!

POZZO You must hold him. [*Pause.*] Come on, come on, raise
him up.

ESTRAGON To hell with him!

VLADIMIR Come on, once more.

ESTRAGON What does he take us for?

[*They raise LUCKY, hold him up.*]

POZZO Don't let him go! [VLADIMIR *and* ESTRAGON *totter.*] Don't
move!

POZZO [*fetches bag and basket and brings them towards LUCKY.*]
Hold him tight! [*He puts the bag in LUCKY's hand. LUCKY drops*

it immediately.] Don't let him go! [He puts back the bag in LUCKY's hand. Gradually, at the feel of the bag, LUCKY recovers his senses and his fingers finally close round the handle.] Hold him tight! [As before with basket.] Now! You can let him go. [VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON move away from LUCKY who totters, reels, sags, but succeeds in remaining on his feet, bag and basket in his hands. POZZO steps back, cracks his whip.] Forward! [LUCKY totters forward.] Back! [LUCKY totters back.] Turn! [LUCKY turns.] Done it! He can walk. [Turning to VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON.] Thank you, gentlemen, and let me . . . [he fumbles in his pockets] . . . let me wish you . . . [fumbles.] . . . wish you . . . [fumbles.] . . . what have I done with my watch? [fumbles.] A genuine half-hunter, gentlemen, with deadbeat escapement!⁴ [Sobbing.] Twas my granpa gave it to me! [He searches on the ground, VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON likewise. POZZO turns over with his foot the remains of LUCKY's hat.] Well now isn't that just—

VLADIMIR Perhaps it's in your fob.⁵

POZZO Wait! [*He doubles up in an attempt to apply his ear to his stomach, listens. Silence.*] I hear nothing. [*He beckons them to approach, VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON go over to him, bend over his stomach.*] Surely one should hear the tick-tick.

VLADIMIR Silence!

[All listen, bent double.]

ESTRAGON I hear something.

POZZO Where?

VLADIMIR It's the heart.

POZZO [*disappointed*] Damnation!

VLADIMIR Silence!

ESTRAGON Perhaps it has stopped.

[They straighten up.]

POZZO Which of you smells so bad?

ESTRAGON He has stinking breath and I have stinking feet.

POZZO I must go.

ESTRAGON And your half-hunter?

POZZO I must have left it at the manor.

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Then adieu.

POZZO Adieu.

VLADIMIR Adieu.

POZZO Adieu.

[*Silence. No one moves.*]

VLADIMIR Adieu.

POZZO Adieu.

ESTRAGON Adieu.

[*Silence.*]

POZZO And thank you.

VLADIMIR Thank *you*.

POZZO Not at all.

ESTRAGON Yes yes.

POZZO No no.

VLADIMIR Yes yes.

ESTRAGON No no.

[*Silence.*]

POZZO I don't seem to be able . . . [*long hesitation*] . . . to depart.

ESTRAGON Such is life.

[*POZZO turns, moves away from LUCKY towards the wings, paying out the rope as he goes.*]

VLADIMIR You're going the wrong way.

POZZO I need a running start. [*Having come to the end of the rope, i.e. off stage, he stops, turns and cries.*] Stand back!

[*VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON stand back, look towards POZZO. Crack of whip.*] On! On!

ESTRAGON On!

VLADIMIR On!

[*LUCKY moves off.*]

POZZO Faster! [*He appears, crosses the stage preceded by LUCKY. VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON wave their hats. Exit LUCKY.*] On! On! [*On the point of disappearing in his turn he stops and turns. The rope tautens. Noise of LUCKY falling off.*] Stool!

[VLADIMIR *fetches stool and gives it to* POZZO *who throws it to* LUCKY.] Adieu!

VLADIMIR

ESTRAGON

} [waving] Adieu! Adieu!

POZZO Up! Pig! [*Noise of* LUCKY *getting up.*] On! [*Exit* POZZO.]

Faster! On! Adieu! Pig! Yip! Adieu!

[*Long silence.*]

VLADIMIR That passed the time.

ESTRAGON It would have passed in any case.

VLADIMIR Yes, but not so rapidly.

[*Pause.*]

ESTRAGON What do we do now?

VLADIMIR I don't know.

ESTRAGON Let's go.

VLADIMIR We can't.

ESTRAGON Why not?

VLADIMIR We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON [*despairingly*] Ah!

[*Pause.*]

VLADIMIR How they've changed!

ESTRAGON Who?

VLADIMIR Those two.

ESTRAGON That's the idea, let's make a little conversation.

VLADIMIR Haven't they?

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR Changed.

ESTRAGON Very likely. They all change. Only we can't.

VLADIMIR Likely! It's certain. Didn't you see them?

ESTRAGON I suppose I did. But I don't know them.

VLADIMIR Yes you do know them.

ESTRAGON No I don't know them.

VLADIMIR We know them, I tell you. You forget everything.

[*Pause. To himself.*] Unless they're not the same . . .

ESTRAGON Why didn't they recognize us then?

VLADIMIR That means nothing. I too pretended not to recognize them. And then nobody ever recognizes us.

ESTRAGON Forget it. What we need—ow! [VLADIMIR *does not react.*] Ow!

VLADIMIR [*to himself*] Unless they're not the same . . .

ESTRAGON Didi! It's the other foot! [*He goes hobbling towards the mound.*]

VLADIMIR Unless they're not the same . . .

BOY [*off*] Mister!

[ESTRAGON *halts. Both look towards the voice.*]

ESTRAGON Off we go again.

VLADIMIR Approach, my child.

[*Enter BOY, timidly. He halts.*]

BOY Mister Albert . . . ?

VLADIMIR Yes.

ESTRAGON What do you want?

VLADIMIR Approach!

[*The BOY does not move.*]

ESTRAGON [*forcibly*] Approach when you're told, can't you?

[*The BOY advances timidly, halts.*]

VLADIMIR What is it?

BOY Mr. Godot . . .

VLADIMIR Obviously . . . [*Pause.*] Approach.

ESTRAGON [*violently*] Will you approach! [*The BOY advances timidly.*] What kept you so late?

VLADIMIR You have a message from Mr. Godot?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR Well, what is it?

ESTRAGON What kept you so late?

[*The BOY looks at them in turn, not knowing to which he should reply.*]

VLADIMIR [*to ESTRAGON*] Let him alone.

ESTRAGON [*violently*] You let me alone. [*Advancing, to the BOY.*] Do you know what time it is?

BOY [*recoiling*] It's not my fault, Sir.

ESTRAGON And whose is it? Mine?

BOY I was afraid, Sir.

ESTRAGON Afraid of what? Of us? [*Pause.*] Answer me!

VLADIMIR I know what it is, he was afraid of the others.

ESTRAGON How long have you been here?

BOY A good while, Sir.

VLADIMIR You were afraid of the whip?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR The roars?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR The two big men.

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR Do you know them?

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR Are you a native of these parts? [*Silence.*] Do you belong to these parts?

BOY Yes Sir.

ESTRAGON That's all a pack of lies. [*Shaking the BOY by the arm.*] Tell us the truth!

BOY [*trembling*] But it is the truth, Sir!

VLADIMIR Will you let him alone! What's the matter with you?

[*ESTRAGON releases the BOY, moves away, covering his face with his hands. VLADIMIR and the BOY observe him. ESTRAGON drops his hands. His face is convulsed.*] What's the matter with you?

ESTRAGON I'm unhappy.

VLADIMIR Not really! Since when?

ESTRAGON I'd forgotten.

VLADIMIR Extraordinary the tricks that memory plays!

[*ESTRAGON tries to speak, renounces, limps to his place, sits down and begins to take off his boots. To BOY*]

Well?

BOY Mr. Godot—

VLADIMIR I've seen you before, haven't I?

BOY I don't know, Sir.

VLADIMIR You don't know me?

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR It wasn't you came yesterday?

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR This is your first time?

BOY Yes Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Words words. [*Pause.*] Speak.

BOY [*in a rush*] Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won't come this evening but surely tomorrow.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Is that all?

BOY Yes Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR You work for Mr. Godot?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR What do you do?

BOY I mind the goats, Sir.

VLADIMIR Is he good to you?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR He doesn't beat you?

BOY No Sir, not me.

VLADIMIR Whom does he beat?

BOY He beats my brother, Sir.

VLADIMIR Ah, you have a brother?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR What does he do?

BOY He minds the sheep, Sir.⁶

VLADIMIR And why doesn't he beat you?

BOY I don't know, Sir.

VLADIMIR He must be fond of you.

BOY I don't know, Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Does he give you enough to eat? [*The BOY hesitates.*]
Does he feed you well?

BOY Fairly well, Sir.

VLADIMIR You're not unhappy? [*The BOY hesitates.*] Do you hear me?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR Well?

BOY I don't know, Sir.

VLADIMIR You don't know if you're unhappy or not?

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR You're as bad as myself. [*Silence.*] Where do you sleep?

BOY In the loft, Sir.

VLADIMIR With your brother?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR In the hay?

BOY Yes Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR All right, you may go.

BOY What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

VLADIMIR Tell him . . . [*he hesitates.*] . . . tell him you saw us. [*Pause.*] You did see us, didn't you?

BOY Yes Sir.

[*He steps back, hesitates, turns and exits running. The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night. The moon rises at back, mounts in the sky, stands still, shedding a pale light on the scene.*]

VLADIMIR At last! [*ESTRAGON gets up and goes towards VLADIMIR, a boot in each hand. He puts them down at edge of stage, straightens and contemplates the moon.*] What are you doing?

ESTRAGON Pale for weariness.

VLADIMIR Eh?

ESTRAGON Of climbing heaven and gazing on the likes of us.

VLADIMIR Your boots, what are you doing with your boots?

ESTRAGON [*turning to look at the boots*] I'm leaving them there. [*Pause.*] Another will come, just as . . . as . . . as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy.

VLADIMIR But you can't go barefoot!

ESTRAGON Christ did.

VLADIMIR Christ! What has Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

ESTRAGON All my life I've compared myself to him.

VLADIMIR But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!

ESTRAGON Yes. And they crucified quick.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR We've nothing more to do here.

ESTRAGON Nor anywhere else.

VLADIMIR Ah Gogo, don't go on like that. Tomorrow everything will be better.

ESTRAGON How do you make that out?

VLADIMIR Did you not hear what the child said?

ESTRAGON No.

VLADIMIR He said that Godot was sure to come tomorrow.

[*Pause.*] What do you say to that?

ESTRAGON Then all we have to do is to wait on here.

VLADIMIR Are you mad? We must take cover. [*He takes*

ESTRAGON *by the arm.*] Come on.

[*He draws ESTRAGON after him. ESTRAGON yields, then resists. They halt.*]

ESTRAGON [*looking at the tree*] Pity we haven't got a bit of rope.

VLADIMIR Come on. It's cold.

[*He draws ESTRAGON after him. As before.*]

ESTRAGON Remind me to bring a bit of rope tomorrow.

VLADIMIR Yes. Come on.

[*He draws him after him. As before.*]

ESTRAGON How long have we been together all the time now?

VLADIMIR I don't know. Fifty years maybe.

ESTRAGON Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhône?²

VLADIMIR We were grape harvesting.

ESTRAGON You fished me out.

VLADIMIR That's all dead and buried.

ESTRAGON My clothes dried in the sun.

VLADIMIR There's no good harking back on that. Come on.
 [He draws him after him. As before.]

ESTRAGON Wait!

VLADIMIR I'm cold!

ESTRAGON Wait! *[He moves away from VLADIMIR.]* I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself. *[He crosses the stage and sits down on the mound.]* We weren't made for the same road.

VLADIMIR *[without anger]* It's not certain.

ESTRAGON No, nothing is certain.
 [VLADIMIR slowly crosses the stage and sits down beside ESTRAGON.]

VLADIMIR We can still part, if you think it would be better.

ESTRAGON It's not worth while now.
 [Silence.]

VLADIMIR No, it's not worth while now.
 [Silence.]

ESTRAGON Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR Yes, let's go.
 [They do not move.]

Curtain.

Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, the 1890s. "It": suicide.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, they should have jumped from the Eiffel Tower, completed in 1889; it was the tallest human-built structure in the world until 1930.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That is, one of the thieves crucified at the same time as Jesus. See Luke 23:32–43.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The salt lake, or inland sea, between Israel and Jordan. "Gospels": the four books of the Bible written by the four

Evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Verbally attacked him, or used foul language toward him. “The other three”: Matthew, Mark, and John. In fact, all the Gospels mention the thieves. John calls them “two others,” and both Matthew and Mark say that the thieves verbally attacked Jesus. See John 19:18, Matthew 27:38–44, and Mark 15:27–32.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A tree often associated with sadness or grief.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8:
In one version of the rest of the bawdy story, the Englishman replies that he wants a boy. Taken aback, the bawd threatens to call a policeman, to which the Englishman replies, “Oh, no, they’re too gritty.” In another version, he is shown through a series of doors, marked by hair color and size of private parts, and finally selects one marked “Grands Cons” (in French slang, literally, large vaginas; figuratively, big idiots). Confirming him as *con*, or idiot, his choice lands him back on the street.
[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: That is, a boxer.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The mandrake is a plant with a forked root that resembles the human body, which, according to medieval European folklore, was said to grow from the semen ejaculated by hanged men and to shriek when uprooted. Hearing the shriek was said to be fatal, or to make the listener go mad.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Compare with the proverb “Strike while the iron is hot.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, making.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An overcoat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A venereal disease, usually gonorrhea (slang).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A wound producing a discharge (hence, figuratively, constant irritation).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Saliva running out of the mouth.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A swelling of the thyroid gland, in the neck.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A dolphin.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: To fool (Irish slang).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In classical mythology, his father was the Titan Iapetus, not Jupiter, the chief god of the Roman pantheon. Atlas had to hold the heavens on his shoulders.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of the highest order.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Invented word, apparently referring to Lucky's position as servant; it may echo the Russian word *knout*, or "whip."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: All four wear bowlers [*Beckett's note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A kind of theater involving music and slapstick comedy, usually based on fairy tales and performed for children around Christmastime in Britain, Ireland, France, and elsewhere.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Vaudeville, or popular entertainment including comedy, singing, and dancing.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A short clay pipe (Irish). "Briar": a pipe made from briar wood.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A brand of pipe from Dublin's most famous tobacco shop.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Greek god of shepherds, flocks, fields, and herds. His appearance was said to create terror similar to that of a stampeding herd, and the word *panic* is derived from his name. Thus, his sleep here may connote an absence of panic.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The sky or the heavens.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As sky—that is, in the capacity of sky.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A play on the French phrase "*oui très bon*," meaning "yes, very good." "Oui! Tray bong!" was also the title of a popular music-hall song performed at the end of the 19th century by Charles Chaplin Sr. (1863–1901).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Ten French francs were then worth about three dollars.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: All lively dances, associated, respectively, with Provence, the Scottish Highlands, France, Ireland, Spain, and England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: That is, his vaporizer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Made-up scholars' names.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Repetition of the Latin word *qua*, meaning "in the capacity of," or "as being," in philosophy.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Partial or total loss of speech. "Apathia": apathy, or the absence of emotion. "Athambia": absence of fear or surprise. All Greek words, of which only "aphasia" is common in English.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The heroine of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), who empathizes with the victims of a shipwreck: "O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer!" (1.2.5–6).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A fictitious place, with a name that echoes the Latin words *esse* (to be) and *posse* (to be able to). "Acacacacademy": a play on the words *academy* and *caca*, a children's word for excrement in French. "Anthropopopometry": that is, anthropometry, the measurement of the human body.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Made-up scholars' names, playing on words for male and female sexual organs.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Made-up scholars' names, with puns on bodily functions.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Nourishment, or feeding.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Women's version of Irish sport of hurling, played with sticks and a ball. "Conating": attempting or desiring (a word created by Beckett from *conation*).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Substitutes.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The last three names are neighborhoods in south London, the first a vulgar pun ("fuck 'em").[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: George Berkeley (1685–1753), Irish philosopher and bishop, who theorized that objects exist only insofar as they are perceived.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A region in western Ireland.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Made-up scholars' names.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A check-and-release mechanism in watches; here, *deadbeat* because it does not work. "Half-hunter": a kind of pocket watch with a hinged metal cover, in the center of which is a small glass window allowing the hands to be seen.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A small front pocket for a watch.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: See the parable in Matthew 25, in which the goats (the damned) are punished and the sheep (the saved) are blessed.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A major river in southeastern France.[Return to reference 7](#)

Act 2

Next day. Same time.

Same place.

[ESTRAGON's boots front center, heels together, toes splayed. LUCKY's hat at same place.]

[The tree has four or five leaves.]

[Enter VLADIMIR agitatedly. He halts and looks long at the tree, then suddenly begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the boots, picks one up, examines it, sniffs it, manifests disgust, puts it back carefully. Comes and goes. Halts extreme right and gazes into distance off, shading his eyes with his hand. Comes and goes. Halts extreme left, as before. Comes and goes. Halts suddenly and begins to sing loudly.]

VLADIMIR A dog came in—

[Having begun too high he stops, clears his throat, resumes:]

A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.
Then cook up with a ladle⁸
And beat him till he was dead.

Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb—

[He stops, broods, resumes:]
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb
And wrote upon the tombstone
For the eyes of dogs to come:

A dog came in the kitchen
And stole a crust of bread.

Then cook up with a ladle
And beat him till he was dead.

Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb—

[He stops, broods, resumes:]
Then all the dogs came running
And dug the dog a tomb—

[He stops, broods. Softly.]
And dug the dog a tomb . . .

[He remains a moment silent and motionless, then begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the tree, comes and goes, before the boots, comes and goes, halts extreme right, gazes into distance, extreme left, gazes into distance. Enter ESTRAGON right, barefoot, head bowed. He slowly crosses the stage. VLADIMIR turns and sees him.]

VLADIMIR You again! *[ESTRAGON halts but does not raise his head.*

VLADIMIR goes towards him.] Come here till I embrace you.

ESTRAGON Don't touch me!

[VLADIMIR holds back, pained.]

VLADIMIR Do you want me to go away? *[Pause.]* Gogo! *[Pause.*

VLADIMIR observes him attentively.] Did they beat you?

[Pause.] Gogo! *[ESTRAGON remains silent, head bowed.]* Where did you spend the night?

ESTRAGON Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!

VLADIMIR Did I ever leave you?

ESTRAGON You let me go.

VLADIMIR Look at me. *[ESTRAGON does not raise his head.*

Violently.] Will you look at me!

[ESTRAGON raises his head. They look long at each other, then suddenly embrace, clapping each other on the back.]

End of the embrace. ESTRAGON, no longer supported, almost falls.]

ESTRAGON What a day!

VLADIMIR Who beat you? Tell me.

ESTRAGON Another day done with.

VLADIMIR Not yet.

ESTRAGON For me it's over and done with, no matter what happens. [*Silence.*] I heard you singing.

VLADIMIR That's right, I remember.

ESTRAGON That finished me. I said to myself, He's all alone, he thinks I'm gone for ever, and he sings.

VLADIMIR One is not master of one's moods. All day I've felt in great form. [*Pause.*] I didn't get up in the night, not once!

ESTRAGON [*sadly*] You see, you piss better when I'm not there.

VLADIMIR I missed you . . . and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a queer thing?

ESTRAGON [*shocked*] Happy?

VLADIMIR Perhaps it's not quite the right word.

ESTRAGON And now?

VLADIMIR Now? . . . [*Joyous.*] There you are again . . .

[*Indifferent.*] There we are again . . . [*Gloomy.*] There I am again.

ESTRAGON You see, you feel worse when I'm with you. I feel better alone too.

VLADIMIR [*vexed*] Then why do you always come crawling back?

ESTRAGON I don't know.

VLADIMIR No, but I do. It's because you don't know how to defend yourself. I wouldn't have let them beat you.

ESTRAGON You couldn't have stopped them.

VLADIMIR Why not?

ESTRAGON There was ten of them.

VLADIMIR No, I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing.

ESTRAGON I wasn't doing anything.

VLADIMIR Then why did they beat you?

ESTRAGON I don't know.

VLADIMIR Ah no, Gogo, the truth is there are things escape you that don't escape me, you must feel it yourself.

ESTRAGON I tell you I wasn't doing anything.

VLADIMIR Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living.

ESTRAGON I wasn't doing anything.

VLADIMIR You must be happy too, deep down, if you only knew it.

ESTRAGON Happy about what?

VLADIMIR To be back with me again.

ESTRAGON Would you say so?

VLADIMIR Say you are, even if it's not true.

ESTRAGON What am I to say?

VLADIMIR Say, I am happy.

ESTRAGON I am happy.

VLADIMIR So am I.

ESTRAGON So am I.

VLADIMIR We are happy.

ESTRAGON We are happy. [*Silence.*] What do we do now, now that we are happy?

VLADIMIR Wait for Godot. [*ESTRAGON groans. Silence.*] Things have changed here since yesterday.

ESTRAGON And if he doesn't come.

VLADIMIR [*after a moment of bewilderment*] We'll see when the time comes. [*Pause.*] I was saying that things have changed here since yesterday.

ESTRAGON Everything oozes.

VLADIMIR Look at the tree.

ESTRAGON It's never the same pus from one second to the next.⁹

VLADIMIR The tree, look at the tree.

[*ESTRAGON looks at the tree.*]

ESTRAGON Was it not there yesterday?

VLADIMIR Yes of course it was there. Do you not remember? We nearly hanged ourselves from it. But you wouldn't. Do you not remember?

ESTRAGON You dreamt it.

VLADIMIR Is it possible you've forgotten already?

ESTRAGON That's the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget.

VLADIMIR And Pozzo and Lucky, have you forgotten them too?

ESTRAGON Pozzo and Lucky?

VLADIMIR He's forgotten everything!

ESTRAGON I remember a lunatic who kicked the shins off me. Then he played the fool.

VLADIMIR That was Lucky.

ESTRAGON I remember that. But when was it?

VLADIMIR And his keeper, do you not remember him?

ESTRAGON He gave me a bone.

VLADIMIR That was Pozzo.

ESTRAGON And all that was yesterday, you say?

VLADIMIR Yes of course it was yesterday.

ESTRAGON And here where we are now?

VLADIMIR Where else do you think? Do you not recognize the place?

ESTRAGON [*suddenly furious*] Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! And you talk to me about scenery! [*Looking wildly about him.*] Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!

VLADIMIR Calm yourself, calm yourself.

ESTRAGON You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms!

VLADIMIR All the same, you can't tell me that this [*gesture*] bears any resemblance to . . . [*he hesitates.*] . . . to the Mâcon country¹ for example. You can't deny there's a big difference.

ESTRAGON The Mâcon country! Who's talking to you about the Mâcon country?

VLADIMIR But you were there yourself, in the Mâcon country.

ESTRAGON No I was never in the Mâcon country! I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you! Here! In the Cackon country!²

VLADIMIR But we were there together, I could swear to it! Picking grapes for a man called . . . [*he snaps his fingers*] . . . can't think of the name of the man, at a place called . . . [*snaps his fingers*] . . . can't think of the name of the place, do you not remember?

ESTRAGON [*a little calmer*] It's possible. I didn't notice anything.

VLADIMIR But down there everything is red!

ESTRAGON [*exasperated*] I didn't notice anything, I tell you! [*Silence. VLADIMIR sighs deeply.*]

VLADIMIR You're a hard man to get on with, Gogo.

ESTRAGON It'd be better if we parted.

VLADIMIR You always say that and you always come crawling back.

ESTRAGON The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.

VLADIMIR What other? [*Pause.*] What other?

ESTRAGON Like billions of others.

VLADIMIR [*sententious*] To every man his little cross. [*He sighs.*] Till he dies. [*Afterthought.*] And is forgotten.

ESTRAGON In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

VLADIMIR You're right, we're inexhaustible.

ESTRAGON It's so we won't think.

VLADIMIR We have that excuse.

ESTRAGON It's so we won't hear.

VLADIMIR We have our reasons.

ESTRAGON All the dead voices.

VLADIMIR They make a noise like wings.

ESTRAGON Like leaves.

VLADIMIR Like sand.

ESTRAGON Like leaves.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR They all speak at once.

ESTRAGON Each one to itself.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Rather they whisper.

ESTRAGON They rustle.

VLADIMIR They murmur.

ESTRAGON They rustle.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR What do they say?

ESTRAGON They talk about their lives.

VLADIMIR To have lived is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON They have to talk about it.

VLADIMIR To be dead is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON It is not sufficient.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR They make a noise like feathers.

ESTRAGON Like leaves.

VLADIMIR Like ashes.

ESTRAGON Like leaves.

[*Long silence.*]

VLADIMIR Say something!

ESTRAGON I'm trying.

[*Long silence.*]

VLADIMIR [*in anguish*] Say anything at all!

ESTRAGON What do we do now?

VLADIMIR Wait for Godot.

ESTRAGON Ah!

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR This is awful!

ESTRAGON Sing something.

VLADIMIR No no! [*He reflects.*] We could start all over again perhaps.

ESTRAGON That should be easy.

VLADIMIR It's the start that's difficult.

ESTRAGON You can start from anything.

VLADIMIR Yes, but you have to decide.

ESTRAGON True.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Help me!

ESTRAGON I'm trying.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR When you seek you hear.

ESTRAGON You do.

VLADIMIR That prevents you from finding.

ESTRAGON It does.

VLADIMIR That prevents you from thinking.

ESTRAGON You think all the same.

VLADIMIR No no, impossible.

ESTRAGON That's the idea, let's contradict each other.

VLADIMIR Impossible.

ESTRAGON You think so?

VLADIMIR We're in no danger of ever thinking any more.

ESTRAGON Then what are we complaining about?

VLADIMIR Thinking is not the worst.

ESTRAGON Perhaps not. But at least there's that.

VLADIMIR That what?

ESTRAGON That's the idea, let's ask each other questions.

VLADIMIR What do you mean, at least there's that?

ESTRAGON That much less misery.

VLADIMIR True.

ESTRAGON Well? If we gave thanks for our mercies?

VLADIMIR What is terrible is to *have* thought.

ESTRAGON But did that ever happen to us?

VLADIMIR Where are all these corpses from?

ESTRAGON These skeletons.

VLADIMIR Tell me that.

ESTRAGON True.

VLADIMIR We must have thought a little.

ESTRAGON At the very beginning.

VLADIMIR A charnel-house! A charnel-house!³

ESTRAGON You don't have to look.

VLADIMIR You can't help looking.

ESTRAGON True.
VLADIMIR Try as one may.
ESTRAGON I beg your pardon?
VLADIMIR Try as one may.
ESTRAGON We should turn resolutely towards Nature.
VLADIMIR We've tried that.
ESTRAGON True.
VLADIMIR Oh it's not the worst, I know.
ESTRAGON What?
VLADIMIR To have thought.
ESTRAGON Obviously.
VLADIMIR But we could have done without it.
ESTRAGON Que voulez-vous?⁴
VLADIMIR I beg your pardon?
ESTRAGON Que voulez-vous.
VLADIMIR Ah! que voulez-vous. Exactly.
[Silence.]
ESTRAGON That wasn't such a bad little canter.
VLADIMIR Yes, but now we'll have to find something else.
ESTRAGON Let me see. [*He takes off his hat, concentrates.*]
VLADIMIR Let me see. [*He takes off his hat, concentrates. Long silence.*] Ah!
[*They put on their hats, relax.*]
ESTRAGON Well?
VLADIMIR What was I saying, we could go on from there.
ESTRAGON What were you saying when?
VLADIMIR At the very beginning.
ESTRAGON The very beginning of WHAT?
VLADIMIR This evening . . . I was saying . . . I was saying . . .
ESTRAGON I'm not a historian.
VLADIMIR Wait . . . we embraced . . . we were happy . . . happy . . . what do we do now that we're happy . . . go on waiting . . . waiting . . . let me think . . . it's coming . . . go on waiting . . . now that we're happy . . . let me see . . . ah! The tree!
ESTRAGON The tree?

VLADIMIR Do you not remember?

ESTRAGON I'm tired.

VLADIMIR Look at it.

[*They look at the tree.*]

ESTRAGON I see nothing.

VLADIMIR But yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves.

ESTRAGON Leaves?

VLADIMIR In a single night.

ESTRAGON It must be the Spring.

VLADIMIR But in a single night!

ESTRAGON I tell you we weren't here yesterday. Another of your nightmares.

VLADIMIR And where were we yesterday evening according to you?

ESTRAGON How would I know? In another compartment. There's no lack of void.

VLADIMIR [*sure of himself*] Good. We weren't here yesterday evening. Now what did we do yesterday evening?

ESTRAGON Do?

VLADIMIR Try and remember.

ESTRAGON Do . . . I suppose we blathered.

VLADIMIR [*controlling himself*] About what?

ESTRAGON Oh . . . this and that I suppose, nothing in particular.

[*With assurance.*] Yes, now I remember, yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That's been going on now for half a century.

VLADIMIR You don't remember any fact, any circumstance?

ESTRAGON [*weary*] Don't torment me, Didi.

VLADIMIR The sun. The moon. Do you not remember?

ESTRAGON They must have been there, as usual.

VLADIMIR You didn't notice anything out of the ordinary?

ESTRAGON Alas!

VLADIMIR And Pozzo? And Lucky?

ESTRAGON Pozzo?

VLADIMIR The bones.

ESTRAGON They were like fishbones.
VLADIMIR It was Pozzo gave them to you.
ESTRAGON I don't know.
VLADIMIR And the kick.
ESTRAGON That's right, someone gave me a kick.
VLADIMIR It was Lucky gave it to you.
ESTRAGON And all that was yesterday?
VLADIMIR Show your leg.
ESTRAGON Which?
VLADIMIR Both. Pull up your trousers. [ESTRAGON *gives a leg to*
VLADIMIR, *staggers*. VLADIMIR *takes the leg*. *They stagger*.] Pull
up your trousers.
ESTRAGON I can't.
[VLADIMIR *pulls up the trousers, looks at the leg, lets it go*.
ESTRAGON *almost falls*.]
VLADIMIR The other. [ESTRAGON *gives the same leg*.] The other,
pig! [ESTRAGON *gives the other leg*. *Triumphantly*.] There's the
wound! Beginning to fester!
ESTRAGON And what about it?
VLADIMIR [*letting go the leg*] Where are your boots?
ESTRAGON I must have thrown them away.
VLADIMIR When?
ESTRAGON I don't know.
VLADIMIR Why?
ESTRAGON [*exasperated*] I don't know why I don't know!
VLADIMIR No, I mean why did you throw them away?
ESTRAGON [*exasperated*] Because they were hurting me!
VLADIMIR [*triumphantly, pointing to the boots*] There they are!
[ESTRAGON *looks at the boots*.] At the very spot where you left
them yesterday!
[ESTRAGON *goes towards the boots, inspects them closely*.]
ESTRAGON They're not mine.
VLADIMIR [*stupefied*] Not yours!
ESTRAGON Mine were black. These are brown.
VLADIMIR You're sure yours were black?
ESTRAGON Well they were a kind of grey.

VLADIMIR And these are brown. Show.
ESTRAGON [*picking up a boot*] Well they're a kind of green.
VLADIMIR Show. [ESTRAGON *hands him the boot*. VLADIMIR *inspects it, throws it down angrily.*] Well of all the—
ESTRAGON You see, all that's a lot of bloody—
VLADIMIR Ah! I see what it is. Yes, I see what's happened.
ESTRAGON All that's a lot of bloody—
VLADIMIR It's elementary. Someone came and took yours and left you his.
ESTRAGON Why?
VLADIMIR His were too tight for him, so he took yours.
ESTRAGON But mine were too tight.
VLADIMIR For you. Not for him.
ESTRAGON [*having tried in vain to work it out*] I'm tired!
[*Pause.*] Let's go.
VLADIMIR We can't.
ESTRAGON Why not?
VLADIMIR We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON Ah! [*Pause. Despairing.*] What'll we do, what'll we do!
VLADIMIR There's nothing we can do.
ESTRAGON But I can't go on like this!
VLADIMIR Would you like a radish?
ESTRAGON Is that all there is?
VLADIMIR There are radishes and turnips.
ESTRAGON Are there no carrots?
VLADIMIR No. Anyway you overdo it with your carrots.
ESTRAGON Then give me a radish. [VLADIMIR *fumbles in his pockets, finds nothing but turnips, finally brings out a radish and hands it to* ESTRAGON *who examines it, sniffs it.*] It's black!
VLADIMIR It's a radish.
ESTRAGON I only like the pink ones, you know that!
VLADIMIR Then you don't want it?
ESTRAGON I only like the pink ones!
VLADIMIR Then give it back to me. [ESTRAGON *gives it back.*]
ESTRAGON I'll go and get a carrot. [*He does not move.*]

VLADIMIR This is becoming really insignificant.

ESTRAGON Not enough.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR What about trying them.

ESTRAGON I've tried everything.

VLADIMIR No, I mean the boots.

ESTRAGON Would that be a good thing?

VLADIMIR It'd pass the time. [ESTRAGON *hesitates.*] I assure you, it'd be an occupation.

ESTRAGON A relaxation.

VLADIMIR A recreation.

ESTRAGON A relaxation.

VLADIMIR Try.

ESTRAGON You'll help me?

VLADIMIR I will of course.

ESTRAGON We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?

VLADIMIR Yes yes. Come on, we'll try the left first.

ESTRAGON We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

VLADIMIR [*impatiently*] Yes yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. [*He picks up a boot.*] Come on, give me your foot. [ESTRAGON *raises his foot.*] The other, hog! [ESTRAGON *raises the other foot.*] Higher! [*Wreathed together they stagger about the stage.* VLADIMIR *succeeds finally in getting on the boot.*] Try and walk. [ESTRAGON *walks.*] Well?

ESTRAGON It fits.

VLADIMIR [*taking string from his pocket*] We'll try and lace it.

ESTRAGON [*vehemently*] No no, no laces, no laces!

VLADIMIR You'll be sorry. Let's try the other. [*As before.*] Well?

ESTRAGON [*grudgingly*] It fits too.

VLADIMIR They don't hurt you?

ESTRAGON Not yet.

VLADIMIR Then you can keep them.

ESTRAGON They're too big.

VLADIMIR Perhaps you'll have socks some day.
ESTRAGON True.
VLADIMIR Then you'll keep them?
ESTRAGON That's enough about these boots.
VLADIMIR Yes, but—
ESTRAGON [*violently*] Enough! [*Silence.*] I suppose I might as well sit down. [*He looks for a place to sit down, then goes and sits down on the mound.*]
VLADIMIR That's where you were sitting yesterday evening.
ESTRAGON If I could only sleep.
VLADIMIR Yesterday you slept.
ESTRAGON I'll try. [*He resumes his foetal posture, his head between his knees.*]
VLADIMIR Wait. [*He goes over and sits down beside ESTRAGON and begins to sing in a loud voice.*]

Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye—

ESTRAGON [*looking up angrily*] Not so loud!
VLADIMIR [*softly*]

Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye bye bye
Bye bye . . .

[ESTRAGON *sleeps*. VLADIMIR *gets up softly, takes off his coat and lays it across ESTRAGON's shoulders, then starts walking up and down, swinging his arms to keep himself warm*. ESTRAGON *wakes with a start, jumps up, casts*⁵*about wildly*. VLADIMIR *returns to him, puts his arms round him.*]

There . . . there . . . Didi is there . . . don't be afraid . . .

ESTRAGON Ah!

VLADIMIR There . . . there . . . it's all over.

ESTRAGON I was falling—

VLADIMIR It's all over, it's all over.

ESTRAGON I was on top of a—

VLADIMIR Don't tell me! Come, we'll walk it off.

[He takes ESTRAGON by the arm and walks him up and down until ESTRAGON refuses to go any further.]

ESTRAGON That's enough. I'm tired.

VLADIMIR You'd rather be stuck there doing nothing?

ESTRAGON Yes.

VLADIMIR Please yourself.

[He releases ESTRAGON, picks up his coat and puts it on.]

ESTRAGON Let's go.

VLADIMIR We can't.

ESTRAGON Why not?

VLADIMIR We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON Ah! *[VLADIMIR walks up and down.]* Can you not stay still?

VLADIMIR I'm cold.

ESTRAGON We came too soon.

VLADIMIR It's always at nightfall.

ESTRAGON But night doesn't fall.

VLADIMIR It'll fall all of a sudden, like yesterday.

ESTRAGON Then it'll be night.

VLADIMIR And we can go.

ESTRAGON Then it'll be day again. *[Pause. Despairing.]* What'll we do, what'll we do!

VLADIMIR *[halting, violently]* Will you stop whining! I've had about my bellyful of your lamentations!

ESTRAGON I'm going.

VLADIMIR *[seeing LUCKY's hat]* Well!

ESTRAGON Farewell.

VLADIMIR Lucky's hat. *[He goes towards it.]* I've been here an hour and never saw it. *[Very pleased.]* Fine!

ESTRAGON You'll never see me again.

VLADIMIR I knew it was the right place. Now our troubles are over. [*He picks up the hat, contemplates it, straightens it.*] Must have been a very fine hat. [*He puts it on in place of his own which he hands to* ESTRAGON.] Here.

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR Hold that.

[ESTRAGON *takes* VLADIMIR'S hat. VLADIMIR *adjusts* LUCKY'S hat on his head. ESTRAGON *puts on* VLADIMIR'S hat in place of his own which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR *takes* ESTRAGON'S hat. ESTRAGON *adjusts* VLADIMIR'S hat on his head. VLADIMIR *puts on* ESTRAGON'S hat in place of LUCKY'S which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON *takes* LUCKY'S hat. VLADIMIR *adjusts* ESTRAGON'S hat on his head. ESTRAGON *puts on* LUCKY'S hat in place of VLADIMIR'S which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR *takes* his hat, ESTRAGON *adjusts* LUCKY'S hat on his head. VLADIMIR *puts on* his hat in place of ESTRAGON'S which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON *takes* his hat. VLADIMIR *adjusts* his hat on his head. ESTRAGON *puts on* his hat in place of LUCKY'S which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR *takes* LUCKY'S hat. ESTRAGON *adjusts* his hat on his head. VLADIMIR *puts on* LUCKY'S hat in place of his own which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON *takes* VLADIMIR'S hat. VLADIMIR *adjusts* LUCKY'S hat on his head. ESTRAGON *hands* VLADIMIR'S hat back to VLADIMIR who takes it and hands it back to ESTRAGON who takes it and hands it back to VLADIMIR who takes it and throws it down.]

How does it fit me?

ESTRAGON How would I know?

VLADIMIR No, but how do I look in it? [*He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.*⁶]

ESTRAGON Hideous.

VLADIMIR Yes, but not more so than usual?

ESTRAGON Neither more nor less.

VLADIMIR Then I can keep it. Mine irked me. [*Pause.*] How shall I say? [*Pause.*] It itched me. [*He takes off* LUCKY'S hat, peers

into it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.]

ESTRAGON I'm going.

[Silence.]

VLADIMIR Will you not play?

ESTRAGON Play at what?

VLADIMIR We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

ESTRAGON Never heard of it.

VLADIMIR I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. *[He imitates LUCKY sagging under the weight of his baggage. ESTRAGON looks at him with stupefaction.]* Go on.

ESTRAGON What am I to do?

VLADIMIR Curse me!

ESTRAGON *[after reflection]* Naughty!

VLADIMIR Stronger!

ESTRAGON Gonococcus! Spirochete!⁷

[VLADIMIR sways back and forth, doubled in two.]

VLADIMIR Tell me to think.

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR Say, Think, pig!

ESTRAGON Think, pig!

[Silence.]

VLADIMIR I can't!

ESTRAGON That's enough of that.

VLADIMIR Tell me to dance.

ESTRAGON I'm going.

VLADIMIR Dance, hog! *[He writhes. Exit ESTRAGON left, precipitately.]* I can't! *[He looks up, misses ESTRAGON.]* Gogo! *[He moves wildly about the stage. Enter ESTRAGON left, panting. He hastens towards VLADIMIR, falls into his arms.]*

There you are again at last!

ESTRAGON I'm accursed!

VLADIMIR Where were you? I thought you were gone for ever.

ESTRAGON They're coming!

VLADIMIR Who?

ESTRAGON I don't know.

VLADIMIR How many?

ESTRAGON I don't know.

VLADIMIR [*triumphantly*] It's Godot! At last! Gogo! It's Godot!

We're saved! Let's go and meet him! [*He drags ESTRAGON towards the wings. ESTRAGON resists, pulls himself free, exits right.*] Gogo! Come back! [*VLADIMIR runs to extreme left, scans the horizon. Enter ESTRAGON right, he hastens towards VLADIMIR, falls into his arms.*] There you are again again!

ESTRAGON I'm in hell!

VLADIMIR Where were you?

ESTRAGON They're coming there too!

VLADIMIR We're surrounded! [*ESTRAGON makes a rush towards back.*] Imbecile! There's no way out there. [*He takes ESTRAGON by the arm and drags him towards front. Gesture towards front.*] There! Not a soul in sight! Off you go! Quick! [*He pushes ESTRAGON towards auditorium. ESTRAGON recoils in horror.*] You won't? [*He contemplates auditorium.*] Well I can understand that. Wait till I see. [*He reflects.*] Your only hope left is to disappear.

ESTRAGON Where?

VLADIMIR Behind the tree. [*ESTRAGON hesitates.*] Quick! Behind the tree. [*ESTRAGON goes and crouches behind the tree, realizes he is not hidden, comes out from behind the tree.*]

Decidedly this tree will not have been the slightest use to us.

ESTRAGON [*calmer*] I lost my head. Forgive me. It won't happen again. Tell me what to do.

VLADIMIR There's nothing to do.

ESTRAGON You go and stand there. [*He draws VLADIMIR to extreme right and places him with his back to the stage.*] There, don't move, and watch out. [*VLADIMIR scans horizon, screening his eyes with his hand. ESTRAGON runs and takes up same position extreme left. They turn their heads and look at each other.*] Back to back like in the good old days. [*They continue to look at each other for a moment, then resume their watch. Long silence.*] Do you see anything coming?

VLADIMIR [*turning his head.*] What?

ESTRAGON [*louder*] Do you see anything coming?

VLADIMIR No.

ESTRAGON Nor I.

[*They resume their watch. Silence.*]

VLADIMIR You must have had a vision.

ESTRAGON [*turning his head*] What?

VLADIMIR [*louder*] You must have had a vision.

ESTRAGON No need to shout!

[*They resume their watch. Silence.*]

VLADIMIR

ESTRAGON

} [*turning simultaneously*] Do you—

VLADIMIR Oh pardon!

ESTRAGON Carry on.

VLADIMIR No no, after you.

ESTRAGON No no, you first.

VLADIMIR I interrupted you.

ESTRAGON On the contrary.

[*They glare at each other angrily.*]

VLADIMIR Ceremonious ape!

ESTRAGON Punctilious pig!

VLADIMIR Finish your phrase, I tell you!

ESTRAGON Finish your own!

[*Silence. They draw closer, halt.*]

VLADIMIR Moron!

ESTRAGON That's the idea, let's abuse each other.

[*They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.*]

VLADIMIR Moron!

ESTRAGON Vermin!

VLADIMIR Abortion!

ESTRAGON Morpion!⁸

VLADIMIR Sewer-rat!

ESTRAGON Curate!

VLADIMIR Cretin!

ESTRAGON [*with finality*] Crritic!

VLADIMIR Oh! [*He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.*]

ESTRAGON Now let's make it up.

VLADIMIR Gogo!

ESTRAGON Didi!

VLADIMIR Your hand!

ESTRAGON Take it!

VLADIMIR Come to my arms!

ESTRAGON Your arms?

VLADIMIR My breast!

ESTRAGON Off we go!

[*They embrace. They separate. Silence.*]

VLADIMIR How time flies when one has fun!

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON What do we do now?

VLADIMIR While waiting.

ESTRAGON While waiting.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR We could do our exercises.

ESTRAGON Our movements.

VLADIMIR Our elevations.

ESTRAGON Our relaxations.

VLADIMIR Our elongations.

ESTRAGON Our relaxations.

VLADIMIR To warm us up.

ESTRAGON To calm us down.

VLADIMIR Off we go.

[VLADIMIR *hops from one foot to the other.* ESTRAGON
imitates him.]

ESTRAGON [*stopping*] That's enough. I'm tired.

VLADIMIR [*stopping*] We're not in form. What about a little deep
breathing?

ESTRAGON I'm tired breathing.

VLADIMIR You're right. [*Pause.*] Let's just do the tree, for the
balance.

ESTRAGON The tree?

[VLADIMIR *does the tree, staggering about on one leg.*]

VLADIMIR [*stopping*] Your turn.

[ESTRAGON *does the tree, staggers.*]

ESTRAGON Do you think God sees me?

VLADIMIR You must close your eyes.

[ESTRAGON *closes his eyes, staggers worse.*]

ESTRAGON [*stopping, brandishing his fists, at the top of his voice*]

God have pity on me!

VLADIMIR [*vexed*] And me?

ESTRAGON On me! On me! Pity! On me!

[*Enter POZZO and LUCKY. POZZO is blind. LUCKY burdened as before. Rope as before, but much shorter, so that POZZO may follow more easily. LUCKY wearing a different hat. At the sight of VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON he stops short. POZZO, continuing on his way, bumps into him.*]

VLADIMIR Gogo!

POZZO [*clutching on to LUCKY who staggers*] What is it? Who is it?

[*LUCKY falls, drops everything and brings down POZZO with him. They lie helpless among the scattered baggage.*]

ESTRAGON Is it Godot?

VLADIMIR At last! [*He goes towards the heap.*] Reinforcements at last!

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON Is it Godot?

VLADIMIR We were beginning to weaken. Now we're sure to see the evening out.

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON Do you hear him?

VLADIMIR We are no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for . . . waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted. Now it's over. It's already tomorrow.

POZZO Help!

VLADIMIR Time flows again already. The sun will set, the moon rise, and we away . . . from here.

POZZO Pity!

VLADIMIR Poor Pozzo!
ESTRAGON I knew it was him.
VLADIMIR Who?
ESTRAGON Godot.
VLADIMIR But it's not Godot.
ESTRAGON It's not Godot?
VLADIMIR It's not Godot.
ESTRAGON Then who is it?
VLADIMIR It's Pozzo.
POZZO Here! Here! Help me up!
VLADIMIR He can't get up.
ESTRAGON Let's go.
VLADIMIR We can't.
ESTRAGON Why not?
VLADIMIR We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON Ah!
VLADIMIR Perhaps he has another bone for you.
ESTRAGON Bone?
VLADIMIR Chicken. Do you not remember?
ESTRAGON It was him?
VLADIMIR Yes.
ESTRAGON Ask him.
VLADIMIR Perhaps we should help him first.
ESTRAGON To do what?
VLADIMIR To get up.
ESTRAGON He can't get up?
VLADIMIR He wants to get up.
ESTRAGON Then let him get up.
VLADIMIR He can't.
ESTRAGON Why not?
VLADIMIR I don't know.
[POZZO *writhes, groans, beats the ground with his fists.*]
ESTRAGON We should ask him for the bone first. Then if he
refuses we'll leave him there.
VLADIMIR You mean we have him at our mercy?
ESTRAGON Yes.

VLADIMIR And that we should subordinate our good offices to certain conditions?

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR That seems intelligent all right. But there's one thing I'm afraid of.

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR That Lucky might get going all of a sudden. Then we'd be ballocksed.⁹

ESTRAGON Lucky?

VLADIMIR The one that went for you yesterday.

ESTRAGON I tell you there was ten of them.

VLADIMIR No, before that, the one that kicked you.

ESTRAGON Is he there?

VLADIMIR As large as life. [*Gesture towards* LUCKY.] For the moment he is inert. But he might run amuck any minute.

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON And suppose we gave him a good beating the two of us?

VLADIMIR You mean if we fell on him in his sleep?

ESTRAGON Yes.

VLADIMIR That seems a good idea all right. But could we do it? Is he really asleep? [*Pause.*] No, the best would be to take advantage of Pozzo's calling for help—

POZZO Help!

VLADIMIR To help him—

ESTRAGON *We help him?*

VLADIMIR In anticipation of some tangible return.

ESTRAGON And suppose he—

VLADIMIR Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! [*Pause. Vehemently.*] Let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed. Not indeed that we personally are needed. Others would meet the case equally well, if not better. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this

moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! What do you say? [ESTRAGON *says nothing.*] It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species. The tiger bounds to the help of his congeners¹ without the least reflexion, or else he slinks away into the depths of the thickets. But that is not the question. What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—

ESTRAGON Ah!

POZZO Help!

VLADIMIR Or for night to fall. [*Pause.*] We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?

ESTRAGON Billions.

VLADIMIR You think so?

ESTRAGON I don't know.

VLADIMIR You may be right.

POZZO Help!

VLADIMIR All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which—how shall I say—which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning?

ESTRAGON [*aphoristic for once*] We are all born mad. Some remain so.

POZZO Help! I'll pay you!

ESTRAGON How much?

POZZO One hundred francs!²

ESTRAGON It's not enough.

VLADIMIR I wouldn't go so far as that.

ESTRAGON You think it's enough?

VLADIMIR No, I mean so far as to assert that I was weak in the head when I came into the world. But that is not the question.

POZZO Two hundred!

VLADIMIR We wait. We are bored. [*He throws up his hand.*] No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! [*He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.*] In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness! [*He broods.*]

POZZO Two hundred!

VLADIMIR We're coming!

[He tries to pull POZZO to his feet, fails, tries again, stumbles, falls, tries to get up, fails.]

ESTRAGON What's the matter with you all?

VLADIMIR Help!

ESTRAGON I'm going.

VLADIMIR Don't leave me! They'll kill me!

POZZO Where am I?

VLADIMIR Gogo!

POZZO Help!

VLADIMIR Help!

ESTRAGON I'm going.

VLADIMIR Help me up first, then we'll go together.

ESTRAGON You promise?

VLADIMIR I swear it!

ESTRAGON And we'll never come back?

VLADIMIR Never!

ESTRAGON We'll go to the Pyrenees.³

VLADIMIR Wherever you like.
ESTRAGON I've always wanted to wander in the Pyrenees.
VLADIMIR You'll wander in them.
ESTRAGON [*recoiling*] Who farted?
VLADIMIR Pozzo.
POZZO Here! Here! Pity!
ESTRAGON It's revolting!
VLADIMIR Quick! Give me your hand!
ESTRAGON I'm going. [*Pause. Louder.*] I'm going.
VLADIMIR Well I suppose in the end I'll get up by myself. [*He tries, fails.*] In the fullness of time.
ESTRAGON What's the matter with you?
VLADIMIR Go to hell.
ESTRAGON Are you staying there?
VLADIMIR For the time being.
ESTRAGON Come on, get up, you'll catch a chill.
VLADIMIR Don't worry about me.
ESTRAGON Come on, Didi, don't be pig-headed!
[*He stretches out his hand which VLADIMIR makes haste to seize.*]
VLADIMIR Pull!
[ESTRAGON *pulls, stumbles, falls. Long silence.*]
POZZO Help!
VLADIMIR We've arrived.
POZZO Who are you?
VLADIMIR We are men.
[*Silence.*]
ESTRAGON Sweet mother earth!
VLADIMIR Can you get up?
ESTRAGON I don't know.
VLADIMIR Try.
ESTRAGON Not now, not now.
[*Silence.*]
POZZO What happened?
VLADIMIR [*violently*] Will you stop it, you! Pest! He can think of nothing but himself!

ESTRAGON What about a little snooze?

VLADIMIR Did you hear him? He wants to know what happened!

ESTRAGON Don't mind him. Sleep.

[*Silence.*]

POZZO Pity! Pity!

ESTRAGON [*with a start*] What is it?

VLADIMIR Were you asleep?

ESTRAGON I must have been.

VLADIMIR It's this bastard Pozzo at it again.

ESTRAGON Make him stop it. Kick him in the crotch.

VLADIMIR [*striking Pozzo*] Will you stop it! Crablouse! [POZZO *extricates himself with cries of pain and crawls away. He stops, saws the air blindly, calling for help.* VLADIMIR, *propped on his elbow, observes his retreat.*] He's off! [POZZO *collapses.*] He's down!

ESTRAGON What do we do now?

VLADIMIR Perhaps I could crawl to him.

ESTRAGON Don't leave me!

VLADIMIR Or I could call to him.

ESTRAGON Yes, call to him.

VLADIMIR Pozzo! [*Silence.*] Pozzo! [*Silence.*] No reply.

ESTRAGON Together.

VLADIMIR

ESTRAGON

} Pozzo! Pozzo!

VLADIMIR He moved.

ESTRAGON Are you sure his name is Pozzo?

VLADIMIR [*alarmed*] Mr. Pozzo! Come back! We won't hurt you!
[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON We might try him with other names.

VLADIMIR I'm afraid he's dying.

ESTRAGON It'd be amusing.

VLADIMIR What'd be amusing?

ESTRAGON To try him with other names, one after the other. It'd pass the time. And we'd be bound to hit on the right one

sooner or later.

VLADIMIR I tell you his name is Pozzo.

ESTRAGON We'll soon see. [*He reflects.*] Abel! Abel!

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON Got it in one!

VLADIMIR I begin to weary of this motif.

ESTRAGON Perhaps the other is called Cain.⁴ Cain! Cain!

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON He's all humanity. [*Silence.*] Look at the little cloud.

VLADIMIR [*raising his eyes*] Where?

ESTRAGON There. In the zenith.⁵

VLADIMIR Well? [*Pause.*] What is there so wonderful about it?
[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Let's pass on now to something else, do you mind?

VLADIMIR I was just going to suggest it.

ESTRAGON But to what?

VLADIMIR Ah!

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Suppose we got up to begin with?

VLADIMIR No harm trying.

[*They get up.*]

ESTRAGON Child's play.

VLADIMIR Simple question of will-power.

ESTRAGON And now?

POZZO Help!

ESTRAGON Let's go.

VLADIMIR We can't.

ESTRAGON Why not?

VLADIMIR We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON Ah! [*Despairing.*] What'll we do, what'll we do!

POZZO Help!

VLADIMIR What about helping him?

ESTRAGON What does he want?

VLADIMIR He wants to get up.

ESTRAGON Then why doesn't he?

VLADIMIR He wants us to help him to get up.

ESTRAGON Then why don't we? What are we waiting for?

[*They help POZZO to his feet, let him go. He falls.*]

VLADIMIR We must hold him. [*They get him up again. POZZO sags between them, his arms round their necks.*] Feeling better?

POZZO Who are you?

VLADIMIR Do you not recognize us?

POZZO I am blind.

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Perhaps he can see into the future.⁶

VLADIMIR Since when?

POZZO I used to have wonderful sight—but are you friends?

ESTRAGON [*laughing noisily*] He wants to know if we are friends!

VLADIMIR No, he means friends of his.

ESTRAGON Well?

VLADIMIR We've proved we are, by helping him.

ESTRAGON Exactly. Would we have helped him if we weren't his friends?

VLADIMIR Possibly.

ESTRAGON True.

VLADIMIR Don't let's quibble about that now.

POZZO You are not highwaymen?

ESTRAGON Highwaymen! Do we look like highwaymen?

VLADIMIR Damn it can't you see the man is blind!

ESTRAGON Damn it so he is. [*Pause.*] So he says.

POZZO Don't leave me!

VLADIMIR No question of it.

ESTRAGON For the moment.

POZZO What time is it?

VLADIMIR [*inspecting the sky*] Seven o'clock . . . eight o'clock . .

ESTRAGON That depends what time of year it is.

POZZO Is it evening?

[*Silence. VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON scrutinize the sunset.*]

ESTRAGON It's rising.
VLADIMIR Impossible.
ESTRAGON Perhaps it's the dawn.
VLADIMIR Don't be a fool. It's the west over there.
ESTRAGON How do you know?
POZZO [*anguished*] Is it evening?
VLADIMIR Anyway it hasn't moved.
ESTRAGON I tell you it's rising.
POZZO Why don't you answer me?
ESTRAGON Give us a chance.
VLADIMIR [*reassuring*] It's evening, Sir, it's evening, night is drawing nigh. My friend here would have me doubt it and I must confess he shook me for a moment. But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day and I can assure you it is very near the end of its repertory. [*Pause.*] How do you feel now?
ESTRAGON How much longer are we to cart him around? [*They half release him, catch him again as he falls.*] We are not caryatids!⁷
VLADIMIR You were saying your sight used to be good, if I heard you right.
POZZO Wonderful! Wonderful, wonderful sight!
[*Silence.*]
ESTRAGON [*irritably*] Expand! Expand!
VLADIMIR Let him alone. Can't you see he's thinking of the days when he was happy. [*Pause.*] *Memoria praeteritorum bonorum*⁸—that must be unpleasant.
ESTRAGON We wouldn't know.
VLADIMIR And it came on you all of a sudden?
POZZO Quite wonderful!
VLADIMIR I'm asking you if it came on you all of a sudden.
POZZO I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune.⁹ [*Pause.*] Sometimes I wonder if I'm not still asleep.
VLADIMIR And when was that?
POZZO I don't know.

VLADIMIR But no later than yesterday—
POZZO [*violently*] Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too.
VLADIMIR Well just fancy that! I could have sworn it was just the opposite.
ESTRAGON I'm going.
POZZO Where are we?
VLADIMIR I couldn't tell you.
POZZO It isn't by any chance the place known as the Board?¹
VLADIMIR Never heard of it.
POZZO What is it like?
VLADIMIR [*looking round*] It's indescribable. It's like nothing. There's nothing. There's a tree.
POZZO Then it's not the Board.
ESTRAGON [*sagging*] Some diversion!
POZZO Where is my menial?
VLADIMIR He's about somewhere.
POZZO Why doesn't he answer when I call?
VLADIMIR I don't know. He seems to be sleeping. Perhaps he's dead.
POZZO What happened exactly?
ESTRAGON Exactly!
VLADIMIR The two of you slipped. [*Pause.*] And fell.
POZZO Go and see is he hurt.
VLADIMIR We can't leave you.
POZZO You needn't both go.
VLADIMIR [*to* ESTRAGON] You go.
ESTRAGON After what he did to me? Never!
POZZO Yes yes, let your friend go, he stinks so. [*Silence.*] What is he waiting for?
VLADIMIR What you waiting for?
ESTRAGON I'm waiting for Godot.
[*Silence.*]
VLADIMIR What exactly should he do?

POZZO Well to begin with he should pull on the rope, as hard as he likes so long as he doesn't strangle him. He usually responds to that. If not he should give him a taste of his boot, in the face and the privates as far as possible.

VLADIMIR [*to* ESTRAGON] You see, you've nothing to be afraid of. It's even an opportunity to revenge yourself.

ESTRAGON And if he defends himself?

POZZO No no, he never defends himself.

VLADIMIR I'll come flying to the rescue.

ESTRAGON Don't take your eyes off me. [*He goes towards* LUCKY.]

VLADIMIR Make sure he's alive before you start. No point in exerting yourself if he's dead.

ESTRAGON [*bending over* LUCKY] He's breathing.

VLADIMIR Then let him have it.

[*With sudden fury* ESTRAGON *starts kicking* LUCKY, *hurling abuse at him as he does so. But he hurts his foot and moves away, limping and groaning.* LUCKY *stirs.*]

ESTRAGON Oh the brute!

[*He sits down on the mound and tries to take off his boot. But he soon desists and disposes himself for sleep, his arms on his knees and his head on his arms.*]

POZZO What's gone wrong now?

VLADIMIR My friend has hurt himself.

POZZO And Lucky?

VLADIMIR So it is he?

POZZO What?

VLADIMIR It is Lucky?

POZZO I don't understand.

VLADIMIR And you are Pozzo?

POZZO Certainly I am Pozzo.

VLADIMIR The same as yesterday?

POZZO Yesterday?

VLADIMIR We met yesterday. [*Silence.*] Do you not remember?

POZZO I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone today. So don't count on me to enlighten you.

VLADIMIR But—

POZZO Enough! Up pig!

VLADIMIR You were bringing him to the fair to sell him. You spoke to us. He danced. He thought. You had your sight.

POZZO As you please. Let me go! [VLADIMIR *moves away.*] Up!

[LUCKY *gets up, gathers up his burdens.*]

VLADIMIR Where do you go from here?

POZZO On. [LUCKY, *laden down, takes his place before* POZZO.]

Whip! [LUCKY *puts everything down, looks for whip, finds it, puts it into* POZZO's *hand, takes up everything again.*] Rope!

[LUCKY *puts everything down, puts end of rope into* POZZO's *hand, takes up everything again.*]

VLADIMIR What is there in the bag?

POZZO Sand. [*He jerks the rope.*] On!

VLADIMIR Don't go yet.

POZZO I'm going.

VLADIMIR What do you do when you fall far from help?

POZZO We wait till we can get up. Then we go on. On!

VLADIMIR Before you go tell him to sing.

POZZO Who?

VLADIMIR Lucky.

POZZO To sing?

VLADIMIR Yes. Or to think. Or to recite.

POZZO But he is dumb.

VLADIMIR Dumb!

POZZO Dumb. He can't even groan.

VLADIMIR Dumb! Since when?

POZZO [*suddenly furious*] Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we'll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? [*Calmer.*] They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more. [*He jerks the rope.*] On!

[*Exeunt*² POZZO and LUCKY. VLADIMIR follows them to the edge of the stage, looks after them. The noise of falling, reinforced by mimic of VLADIMIR, announces that they are down again. Silence. VLADIMIR goes towards ESTRAGON, contemplates him a moment, then shakes him awake.]

ESTRAGON [*wild gestures, incoherent words. Finally.*] Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON I was dreaming I was happy.

VLADIMIR That passed the time.

ESTRAGON I was dreaming that—

VLADIMIR [*violently*] Don't tell me! [*Silence.*] I wonder is he really blind.

ESTRAGON Blind? Who?

VLADIMIR Pozzo.

ESTRAGON Blind?

VLADIMIR He told us he was blind.

ESTRAGON Well what about it?

VLADIMIR It seemed to me he saw us.

ESTRAGON You dreamt it. [*Pause.*] Let's go. We can't. Ah!

[*Pause.*] Are you sure it wasn't him?

VLADIMIR Who?

ESTRAGON Godot.

VLADIMIR But who?

ESTRAGON Pozzo.

VLADIMIR Not at all! [*Less sure.*] Not at all! [*Still less sure.*] Not at all!

ESTRAGON I suppose I might as well get up. [*He gets up painfully.*] Ow! Didi!

VLADIMIR I don't know what to think any more.

ESTRAGON My feet! [*He sits down again and tries to take off his boots.*] Help me!

VLADIMIR Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this

place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? [ESTRAGON, *having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again.* VLADIMIR *looks at him.*] He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. [*Pause.*] Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps.³ We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. [*He listens.*] But habit is a great deadener. [*He looks again at* ESTRAGON.] At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. [*Pause.*] I can't go on! [*Pause.*] What have I said?

[He goes feverishly to and fro, halts finally at extreme left, broods. Enter BOY right. He halts. Silence.]

BOY Mister . . . [VLADIMIR *turns.*] Mister Albert . . .

VLADIMIR Off we go again. [*Pause.*] Do you not recognize me?

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR It wasn't you came yesterday.

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR This is your first time.

BOY Yes Sir.

[Silence.]

VLADIMIR You have a message from Mr. Godot.

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR He won't come this evening.

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR But he'll come tomorrow.

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR Without fail.

BOY Yes Sir.

[Silence.]

VLADIMIR Did you meet anyone?

BOY No Sir.

VLADIMIR Two other . . . [*he hesitates.*] . . . men?

BOY I didn't see anyone, Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR What does he do, Mr. Godot? [*Silence.*] Do you hear me?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR Well?

BOY He does nothing, Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR How is your brother?

BOY He's sick, Sir.

VLADIMIR Perhaps it was he came yesterday.

BOY I don't know, Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR [*softly*] Has he a beard, Mr. Godot?

BOY Yes Sir.

VLADIMIR Fair or . . . [*he hesitates.*] . . . or black?

BOY I think it's white, Sir.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Christ have mercy on us!

[*Silence.*]

BOY What am I to tell Mr. Godot, Sir?

VLADIMIR Tell him . . . [*he hesitates*] . . . tell him you saw me and that . . . [*he hesitates*] . . . that you saw me. [*Pause.*

VLADIMIR *advances, the BOY recoils. VLADIMIR halts, the BOY halts. With sudden violence.*] You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!

[*Silence. VLADIMIR makes a sudden spring forward, the BOY avoids him and exits running. Silence. The sun sets, the moon rises. As in Act 1. VLADIMIR stands motionless and bowed. ESTRAGON wakes, takes off his boots, gets up with one in each hand and goes and puts them down center front, then goes towards VLADIMIR.*]

ESTRAGON What's wrong with you?

VLADIMIR Nothing.

ESTRAGON I'm going.

VLADIMIR So am I.

ESTRAGON Was I long asleep?

VLADIMIR I don't know.

[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Where shall we go?

VLADIMIR Not far.

ESTRAGON Oh yes, let's go far away from here.

VLADIMIR We can't.

ESTRAGON Why not?

VLADIMIR We have to come back tomorrow.

ESTRAGON What for?

VLADIMIR To wait for Godot.

ESTRAGON Ah! [*Silence.*] He didn't come?

VLADIMIR No.

ESTRAGON And now it's too late.

VLADIMIR Yes, now it's night.

ESTRAGON And if we dropped him? [*Pause.*] If we dropped him?

VLADIMIR He'd punish us. [*Silence. He looks at the tree.*]

Everything's dead but the tree.

ESTRAGON [*looking at the tree*] What is it?

VLADIMIR It's the tree.

ESTRAGON Yes, but what kind?

VLADIMIR I don't know. A willow.

[ESTRAGON *draws* VLADIMIR *towards the tree. They stand motionless before it. Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Why don't we hang ourselves?

VLADIMIR With what?

ESTRAGON You haven't got a bit of rope?

VLADIMIR No.

ESTRAGON Then we can't.

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR Let's go.

ESTRAGON Wait, there's my belt.

VLADIMIR It's too short.

ESTRAGON You could hang onto my legs.

VLADIMIR And who'd hang on to mine?

ESTRAGON True.

VLADIMIR Show all the same. [ESTRAGON *loosens the cord that holds up his trousers which, much too big for him, fall about his ankles. They look at the cord.*] It might do at a pinch. But is it strong enough?

ESTRAGON We'll soon see. Here.
[*They each take an end of the cord and pull. It breaks. They almost fall.*]

VLADIMIR Not worth a curse.
[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON You say we have to come back tomorrow?

VLADIMIR Yes.

ESTRAGON Then we can bring a good bit of rope.

VLADIMIR Yes.
[*Silence.*]

ESTRAGON Didi.

VLADIMIR Yes.

ESTRAGON I can't go on like this.

VLADIMIR That's what you think.

ESTRAGON If we parted? That might be better for us.

VLADIMIR We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. [*Pause.*] Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON And if he comes?

VLADIMIR We'll be saved.
[VLADIMIR *takes off his hat (LUCKY'S), peers inside it, feels about inside it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.*]

ESTRAGON Well? Shall we go?

VLADIMIR Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON What?

VLADIMIR Pull on your trousers.

ESTRAGON You want me to pull off my trousers?

VLADIMIR Pull ON your trousers.

ESTRAGON [*realizing his trousers are down*] True. [*He pulls up his trousers.*]

VLADIMIR Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON Yes, let's go.

[*They do not move.*]
Curtain.

1952; 1954

Endnotes

- Note 8: That is, the cook took up a ladle. Vladimir sings a round song.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: See "You can never step into the same river twice," a statement on flux by the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (active ca. 500 B.C.E.).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A wine-producing area in the Burgundy region of eastern France.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Punning on *caca*, children's word in French for excrement.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A vault for the bodies or bones of the dead.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: What do you want? (formal French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Looks.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A person employed to model clothes.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: One of a group of bacteria, usually the one that causes syphilis. "Gonococcus": the bacterium that causes gonorrhea.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Crab louse (a common French word, now obsolete in English).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Screwed (slang); from *bollocks*, or testicles.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Members of his kind.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Then worth about thirty dollars.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mountain range along the border between France and Spain.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The older son of Adam and Eve, who murdered his brother, Abel. See Genesis 4:1–15.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The point of the sky directly overhead.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Perhaps a reference to Tiresias, a figure in Greek mythology and literature who, although blind, possessed the gift of prophecy.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Female figures serving as support columns in classical buildings.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The memory of past good (Latin, quoting the *Summa Theologica Secunda* 2.2.36.1, by theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas [1225–1274]).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The Roman goddess of chance or luck, sometimes depicted as blindfolded.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The stage, or the profession of acting, is often called “the boards.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: [They] exit (Latin).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An instrument used in obstetrics to pull the baby out of the birth canal.[Return to reference 3](#)

W. H. AUDEN

1907–1973

Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, England, the son of a doctor and of a former nurse. He was educated at private schools and Christ Church, Oxford. After graduation from Oxford he traveled abroad, taught school in England from 1930 to 1935, and later worked for a government film unit. His sympathies in the 1930s were with the left, like those of most intellectuals of his age, and he went to Spain during its civil war, intending to serve as an ambulance driver on the left-wing Republican side. To his surprise he felt so disturbed by the sight of the many Roman Catholic churches gutted and looted by the Republicans that he returned to England without fulfilling his ambition. He traveled in Iceland and China before moving to the United States in 1939; in 1946 he became an American citizen. He taught at a number of American colleges and was professor of poetry at Oxford from 1956 to 1960. Most of his later life was shared between residences in New York City and in Europe—first in southern Italy, then in Austria.

Auden was the most prominent of the young English poets who, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, saw themselves bringing new techniques and attitudes to English poetry. Stephen Spender, C. Day-Lewis, and Louis MacNeice were other liberal and leftist poets in this loosely affiliated group. Auden learned metrical and verbal techniques from Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wilfred Owen, and from T. S. Eliot he took a conversational and ironic tone, an acute

inspection of cultural decay. Thomas Hardy's metrical variety, formal irregularity, and fusion of panoramic and intimate perspectives also proved a useful example, and Auden admired W. B. Yeats's "serious reflective" poems of "personal and public interest," though he later came to disavow Yeats's grand aspirations and rhetoric. Auden's English studies at Oxford familiarized him with the rhythms and long alliterative line of Anglo-Saxon poetry. He learned, too, from popular and folk culture, particularly the songs of the English music hall and, later, American blues singers.

The Depression that hit America in 1929 hit England soon afterward, and Auden and his contemporaries looked out at an England of industrial stagnation and mass unemployment, seeing not Eliot's metaphorical Waste Land but a more literal Waste Land of poverty and "depressed areas." Auden's early poetry diagnoses the ills of his country. This diagnosis, conducted in a verse that combines irreverence with craftsmanship, draws on both Freud and Marx to show England now as a nation of neurotic invalids, now as the victim of an antiquated economic system. The intellectual liveliness and nervous force of this work made a great impression, even though the compressed, elliptical, impersonal style created difficulties of interpretation.

Gradually Auden sought to clarify his imagery and syntax, and in the late 1930s he produced "Lullaby," "Musée des Beaux Arts," "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," and other poems of finely disciplined movement, pellucid clarity, and deep yet unsentimental feeling. Some of the poems he wrote at this time, such as "Spain" and "September 1, 1939," aspire to a visionary perspective on political and social change; but as Auden became increasingly skeptical of poetry in the grand manner, of poetry as revelation or as a tool for political change, he removed these poems from his canon. (He came to see as false his claim in "September 1, 1939" that "We must love one another or die.") "Poetry is not magic," he said in the essay "Writing," but a form of truth telling that should "disenchant and disintoxicate." As he continued to remake his style during World War II, he created a voice that, in contrast not only to Romanticism but

also to the authoritarianism devastating Europe, was increasingly flat, ironic, and conversational. He never lost his ear for popular speech or his ability to combine elements from popular art with technical formality. He daringly mixed the grave and the flippant, vivid detail and allegorical abstraction. He always experimented, particularly in ways of bringing together high artifice and a colloquial tone.

The poems of Auden's last phase are increasingly personal in tone and combine an air of offhand informality with remarkable technical skill in versification. He turned out, as if effortlessly, poems in numerous verse forms, including sestinas, sonnets, ballads, canzones, syllabics, haiku, the blues, even limericks. As he became evermore mistrustful of a prophetic role for the poet, he embraced the ordinary—the hours of the day, the rooms of a house, a changeable landscape. He took refuge in love and friendship, particularly the love and friendship he shared with the American writer Chester Kallmann. Like Eliot, Auden became a member of the Church of England, and the emotions of his late poetry—sometimes comic, sometimes solemn—were grounded in an ever deepening but rarely obtrusive religious feeling. In the last year of his life he returned to England to live in Oxford, feeling the need to be part of a university community as a protection against loneliness. Auden is now generally recognized as one of the masters of twentieth-century English poetry, a thoughtful, seriously playful poet, combining extraordinary intelligence and immense craftsmanship.

A note on the texts: Auden heavily revised his poems, sometimes omitting stanzas (as in "Spain" and "In Memory of W. B. Yeats") or even entire poems ("Spain" and "September 1, 1939"). The texts below are reprinted as they first appeared in book form and again in his *Selected Poems: A New Edition*, ed. Edward Mendelson (1989).

Petition¹

Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will his negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch²
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,[°]
5 And the distortions of ingrown virginity.
Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
And gradually correct the coward's stance;
Cover in time with beams those in retreat
That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were
10 great;
Publish each healer that in city lives
Or country houses at the end of drives;
Harrow the house of the dead; look shining at
New styles of architecture, a change of heart.

Oct. 1929/1930

Endnotes

- Note 1: This title, by which the poem is widely known, is from Auden's later collections. Many of his early poems first appeared without titles.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The king's touch was often regarded as miraculous cure for disease (that is, *sovereign* as an adjective, meaning "supreme, all-dominating").[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *tonsillitis*[Return to reference °](#)

On This Island¹

Look, stranger, at this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
5 That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea.

Here at the small field's ending pause
Where the chalk wall falls to the foam, and its tall
ledges
10 Oppose the pluck
And knock of the tide,
And the shingle scrambles after the suck-
ing surf, and the gull lodges
A moment on its sheer side.

15 Far off like floating seeds the ships
Diverge on urgent voluntary errands;
And the full view
Indeed may enter
And move in memory as now these clouds do,
20 That pass the harbour mirror
And all the summer through the water saunter.

Nov. 19351936

Endnotes

- Note 1: The title is from Auden's later collections. [Return to reference 1](#)

Lullaby¹

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
5 Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

10 Soul and body have no bounds:
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus^o sends
15 Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes
Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit's sensual ecstasy.

20 Certainty, fidelity
On the stroke of midnight pass
Like vibrations of a bell,
And fashionable madmen raise
Their pedantic boring cry:
25 Every farthing² of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,

30 Not a kiss nor look be lost.
Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of sweetness show
35 Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness see you fed
By the involuntary powers,
Nights of insult let you pass
40 Watched by every human love.

Jan. 1937⁴⁰1937, 1940

Endnotes

- Note 1: Title from Auden's later collections.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A quarter-penny, at one time the smallest and least valuable British coin.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *Roman goddess of love*[Return to reference °](#)

Spain¹

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the
diffusion

Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;²
Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny
climates.

5 Yesterday the assessment of insurance by cards,
The divination of water; yesterday the invention
Of cartwheels and clocks, the taming of
Horses. Yesterday the bustling world of the
navigators.

10 Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants,
The fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the
valley,
The chapel built in the forest;
Yesterday the carving of angels and alarming
gargoyles;

The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;
Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
And the miraculous cure at the fountain;
15 Yesterday the Sabbath of witches; but to-day the
struggle.

20 Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines,
The construction of railways in the colonial desert;
Yesterday the classic lecture
On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle.

Yesterday the belief in the absolute value of Greek,
The fall of the curtain upon the death of a hero;
 Yesterday the prayer to the sunset
And the adoration of madmen. But to-day the
 struggle.

25 As the poet whispers, startled among the pines,
Or where the loose waterfall sings compact, or
 upright
 On the crag by the leaning tower:
"O my vision. O send me the luck of the sailor."

30 And the investigator peers through his instruments
At the inhuman provinces, the virile bacillus
 Or enormous Jupiter finished:
"But the lives of my friends. I inquire. I inquire."

And the poor in their fireless lodgings, dropping the
 sheets
Of the evening paper: "Our day is our loss, O show
 us
35 History the operator, the
Organiser, Time the refreshing river."

And the nations combine each cry, invoking the life
That shapes the individual belly and orders
 The private nocturnal terror:
40 "Did you not found the city state of the sponge,

"Raise the vast military empires of the shark
And the tiger, establish the robin's plucky canton?
 Intervene. O descend as a dove or
A furious papa or a mild engineer,³ but descend."

45 And the life, if it answers at all, replies from the
 heart

And the eyes and the lungs, from the shops and
squares of the city

“O no, I am not the mover;
Not to-day; not to you. To you, I’m the

50 “Yes-man, the bar-companion, the easily-duped;
I am whatever you do. I am your vow to be
Good, your humorous story.
I am your business voice. I am your marriage.

55 “What’s your proposal? To build the just city? I will.
I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic
Death? Very well, I accept, for
I am your choice, your decision. Yes, I am Spain.”

60 Many have heard it on remote peninsulas,
On sleepy plains, in the aberrant fishermen’s islands
Or the corrupt heart of the city,
Have heard and migrated like gulls or the seeds of a
flower.

They clung like burrs to the long expresses that lurch
Through the unjust lands, through the night, through
the alpine tunnel;
They floated over the oceans;
They walked the passes. All presented their lives.

65 On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from
hot
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe;
On that tableland scored by rivers,
Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of
our fever

Are precise and alive. For the fears which made us
respond

70 To the medicine ad. and the brochure of winter
cruises
Have become invading battalions;
And our faces, the institute-face, the chain-store, the
ruin

Are projecting their greed as the firing squad and the
bomb.
Madrid is the heart. Our moments of tenderness
blossom
75 As the ambulance and the sandbag;
Our hours of friendship into a people's army.

To-morrow, perhaps the future. The research on
fatigue
And the movements of packers; the gradual
exploring of all the
Octaves of radiation;
80 To-morrow the enlarging of consciousness by diet
and breathing.

To-morrow the rediscovery of romantic love,
The photographing of ravens; all the fun under
Liberty's masterful shadow;
To-morrow the hour of the pageant-master and the
musician,

85 The beautiful roar of the chorus under the dome;
To-morrow the exchanging of tips on the breeding of
terriers,
The eager election of chairmen
By the sudden forest of hands. But to-day the
struggle.

To-morrow for the young the poets exploding like
bombs,

90 The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect
 communion;
 To-morrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-
 day the struggle.

 To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of
 death,
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary
 murder;⁴

95 To-day the expending of powers
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring
 meeting.

 To-day the makeshift consolations: the shared
 cigarette,
The cards in the candlelit barn, and the scraping
 concert,
 The masculine jokes; to-day the
Fumbled and unsatisfactory embrace before hurting.

100 The stars are dead. The animals will not look.
We are left alone with our day, and the time is short,
 and
 History to the defeated
May say Alas but cannot help nor pardon.

Mar. 1937

Endnotes

- Note 1:
The Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936 as a rebellion by General Franco's right-wing army against the left-wing, elected Spanish government, was viewed by British liberal intellectuals as a testing struggle between fascism and democracy. Written

while the war was raging, this poem appeared separately in 1937, the proceeds of its sale going to Medical Aid for Spain. In 1940 Auden retitled the poem "Spain 1937," deleted lines 69–76, and made other changes; later he removed the poem from his canon.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Ancient stone circle. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Auden plays on the idea of a deus ex machina, literally a god from a machine, who appears suddenly in a play to resolve an impasse. "Dove": in the Bible, the form taken by the Holy Spirit when descending to Earth. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: After these two lines were criticized by George Orwell, Auden revised them to read "the inevitable increase" and "the fact of murder." [Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *district* [Return to reference °](#)

As I Walked Out One Evening¹

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

5 And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under an arch of the railway:
"Love has no ending.

"I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet
10 And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street.

"I'll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry
15 And the seven stars² go squawking
Like geese about the sky.

"The years shall run like rabbits
For in my arms I hold
The Flower of the Ages
20 And the first love of the world."

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
"O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.

"In the burrows of the Nightmare

25 Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

30 “In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or to-day.

35 “Into many a green valley
Drifts the appalling³ snow;
Time breaks the threaded dances
And the diver’s brilliant bow.

40 “O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you’ve missed.

 “The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

45 “Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer
And Jill goes down on her back.⁴

50 “O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress;
Life remains a blessing
Although you cannot bless.

 “O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;

55 You shall love your crooked neighbour
 With your crooked heart."

 It was late, late in the evening,
 The lovers they were gone;
 The clocks had ceased their chiming
 And the deep river ran on.

60
Nov. 1937¹⁹³⁸, 1940

Endnotes

- Note 1: Title from Auden's later collections. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The constellation of the Pleiades, supposed by the ancients to be seven sisters. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Literally, making white. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The giant of "Jack and the Bean Stalk" is trying to seduce Jack; the "lily-white Boy" (presumably pure) becomes a boisterous reveler; Jill, of "Jack and Jill," is seduced. [Return to reference 4](#)

Musée des Beaux Arts¹

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window
or just walking dully along;
5 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately
waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen,
skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
10 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its
course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the
torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*,² for instance: how everything
turns away
15 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman
may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun
shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the
green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must
have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,

20
Dec. 19381940

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Museum of Fine Arts (French).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
The Fall of Icarus, by the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel (ca. 1525–1569), in the Musées Royaux des Beaux Arts in Brussels. In one corner of Brueghel's painting, Icarus's legs are seen disappearing into the sea, his wings having melted when he flew too close to the sun. Auden also alludes to other paintings by Brueghel: the nativity scene in *The Numbering at Bethlehem*, skaters in *Winter Landscape with Skaters and a Bird Trap*, and possibly animals in *The Massacre of the Innocents*.
[Return to reference 2](#)

In Memory of W. B. Yeats¹

(d. January 1939)

I

He disappeared in the dead of winter:
The brooks were frozen, the air-ports almost
deserted,
And snow disfigured the public statues;
The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.
O all the instruments agree
5 The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness
The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,
The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable
quays;
By mourning tongues
10 The death of the poet was kept from his poems.

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,
An afternoon of nurses and rumours;
The provinces of his body revolted,
The squares of his mind were empty,
15 Silence invaded the suburbs,
The current of his feeling failed: he became his
admirers.

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections;
To find his happiness in another kind of wood²
20 And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.

The words of a dead man
Are modified in the guts of the living.

25 But in the importance and noise of to-morrow
When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor
of the Bourse,³
And the poor have the sufferings to which they are
fairly accustomed,
And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of
his freedom;
A few thousand will think of this day
As one thinks of a day when one did something
slightly unusual.

30 O all the instruments agree
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

II

You were silly like us: your gift survived it all;
The parish of rich women,⁴ physical decay,
Yourself; mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
35 For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its saying where executives
Would never want to tamper; it flows south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
40 A way of happening, a mouth.

III⁵

Earth, receive an honoured guest;
William Yeats is laid to rest:
Let the Irish vessel lie

45 Emptied of its poetry.
Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and innocent,
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique,
50 Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honours at their feet.
Time that with this strange excuse
55 Pardoned Kipling⁶ and his views,
And will pardon Paul Claudel,⁷
Pardons him for writing well.
In the nightmare of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark,⁸
60 And the living nations wait,
Each sequestered in its hate;
Intellectual disgrace
Stares from every human face,
And the seas of pity lie
65 Locked and frozen in each eye.
Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice;
70 With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
 Let the healing fountain start,
 In the prison of his days
 Teach the free man how to praise.

Feb. 1939 1939, 1940

Endnotes

- Note 1: The Irish poet William Butler Yeats, born in 1865, died on January 29, 1939, in Roquebrune (southern France). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See the beginning of Dante's *Inferno*: "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost" (1.1–3). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The French stock exchange. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Several wealthy women, including Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), provided financial help to Yeats. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The stanza pattern of this section echoes that of Yeats's late poem "Under Ben Bulbin." Auden later omitted the section's second, third, and fourth stanzas. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The British writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) championed imperialism. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: French author (1868–1955) with extremely conservative politics. Yeats was at times antidemocratic and appeared to favor dictatorship. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: World War II began in September 1939. [Return to reference 8](#)

The Unknown Citizen

To JS/07/M/378

This Marble Monument is Erected by the State

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word,
he was a saint,
5 For in everything he did he served the Greater
Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
10 For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a
drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper
every day
15 And that his reactions to advertisements were
normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully
insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital
but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living
declare

He was fully sensible to the advantages of the
Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man;
20 A gramophone, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of
year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when
there was war, he went.
25 He was married and added five children to the
population,
Which our Eugenist¹ says was the right number for a
parent of his generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with
their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have
heard.

Mar. 1939 1939, 1940

Endnotes

- Note 1: An expert in eugenics, a pseudoscience for the genetic “improvement” of humans. [Return to reference 1](#)

September 1, 1939¹

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street²
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
5 Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
10 Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther³ until now
That has driven a culture mad,
15 Find what occurred at Linz,⁴
What huge imago⁵ made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
20 Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides⁶ knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
25 And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;

Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
30 The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
35 Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
40 In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
45 Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
50 The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.
55

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev²
60 Is true of the normal heart;

For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
65 But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow,
70 "I *will* be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work,"
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
75 Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?⁸

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
80 Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
85 Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.⁹

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
90 Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:

May I, composed like them
 Of Eros^o and of dust,
 Beleaguered by the same
 Negation and despair,
 Show an affirming flame.

Sept. 1939 1939, 1940

Endnotes

- Note 1: The date of Germany's invasion of Poland and the outbreak of World War II. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In New York City, where Auden was living. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Martin Luther (1483–1546), founder of the Protestant Reformation. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Austrian city where Hitler spent his childhood. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Psychoanalytic term for the unconscious representation of a parental figure. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Greek general (d. ca. 401 B.C.E.) and historian of the Peloponnesian War, exiled from Athens because he failed to prevent the Spartans from seizing a colony. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Russian dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky (1890–1950) wrote that his former lover, the ballet impresario Sergey Diaghilev (1872–1929), "does not want universal love, but to be loved alone." [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Proverbs 31:8. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Auden later revised this line, which struck him as "dishonest." In one version of the poem the line reads: "We must love one another and die." Another version leaves out the entire stanza. [Return to reference 9](#)

Notes

- °: *Greek god of desire*[Return to reference](#) °

In Praise of Limestone¹

If it form the one landscape that we the inconstant
ones

Are consistently homesick for, this is chiefly
Because it dissolves in water. Mark these rounded
slopes

5 With their surface fragrance of thyme and beneath
A secret system of caves and conduits; hear these
springs

That spurt out everywhere with a chuckle
Each filling a private pool for its fish and carving
Its own little ravine whose cliffs entertain
The butterfly and the lizard; examine this region
Of short distances and definite places:

10 What could be more like Mother or a fitter
background

For her son, for the nude young male who lounges
Against a rock displaying his dildo,^o never doubting
That for all his faults he is loved, whose works are
but

15 Extensions of his power to charm? From weathered
outcrop

To hill-top temple, from appearing waters to
Conspicuous fountains, from a wild to a formal
vineyard,

Are ingenious but short steps that a child's wish
To receive more attention than his brothers, whether
By pleasing or teasing, can easily take.

20

Watch, then, the band of rivals as they climb up and
down

Their steep stone gennels² in twos and threes,
 sometimes
 Arm in arm, but never, thank God, in step; or
 engaged
 On the shady side of a square at midday in
 Voluble discourse, knowing each other too well to
 think
 There are any important secrets, unable
 To conceive a god whose temper-tantrums are moral
 And not to be pacified by a clever line
 Or a good lay: for, accustomed to a stone that
 responds,
 They have never had to veil their faces in awe
 Of a crater whose blazing fury could not be fixed;
 Adjusted to the local needs of valleys
 Where everything can be touched or reached by
 walking,
 Their eyes have never looked into infinite space
 Through the lattice-work of a nomad's comb; born
 lucky,
 Their legs have never encountered the fungi
 And insects of the jungle, the monstrous forms and
 lives
 With which we have nothing, we like to hope, in
 common.
 So, when one of them goes to the bad, the way his
 mind works
 Remains comprehensible: to become a pimp
 Or deal in fake jewelry or ruin a fine tenor voice
 For effects that bring down the house could
 happen to all
 But the best and the worst of us . . .
 That is why, I
 suppose,

The best and worst never stayed here long but
sought
45 Immoderate soils where the beauty was not so
external,
The light less public and the meaning of life
Something more than a mad camp. "Come!" cried
the granite wastes,
"How evasive is your humor, how accidental
Your kindest kiss, how permanent is death." (Saints-
to-be
50 Slipped away sighing.) "Come!" purred the clays
and gravels
"On our plains there is room for armies to drill; rivers
Wait to be tamed and slaves to construct you a
tomb
In the grand manner: soft as the earth is mankind
and both
Need to be altered." (Intendant Caesars rose and
Left, slamming the door.) But the really reckless were
55 fetched
By an older colder voice, the oceanic whisper:
"I am the solitude that asks and promises nothing;
That is how I shall set you free. There is no love;
There are only the various envies, all of them sad."
60 They were right, my dear, all those voices were right
And still are; this land is not the sweet home that it
looks,
Nor its peace the historical calm of a site
Where something was settled once and for all: A
backward
And dilapidated province, connected
65 To the big busy world by a tunnel, with a certain
Seedy appeal, is that all it is now? Not quite:
It has a worldly duty which in spite of itself
It does not neglect, but calls into question

All the Great Powers assume; it disturbs our rights.
The poet,
Admired for his earnest habit of calling
70 The sun the sun, his mind Puzzle, is made uneasy
By these solid statues which so obviously doubt
His antimythological myth; and these gamins,^o
Pursuing the scientist down the tiled colonnade
75 With such lively offers, rebuke his concern for
Nature's
Remotest aspects: I, too, am reproached, for what
And how much you know. Not to lose time, not to
get caught,
Not to be left behind, not, please! to resemble
The beasts who repeat themselves, or a thing like
water
Or stone whose conduct can be predicted, these
80 Are our Common Prayer³ whose greatest comfort is
music
Which can be made anywhere, is invisible,
And does not smell. In so far as we have to look
forward
To death as a fact, no doubt we are right: But if
Sins can be forgiven, if bodies rise from the dead,
85 These modifications of matter into
Innocent athletes and gesticulating fountains,
Made solely for pleasure, make a further point:
The blessed will not care what angle they are
regarded from,
90 Having nothing to hide. Dear, I know nothing of
Either, but when I try to imagine a faultless love
Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur
Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone
landscape.

May 1948 1948, 1951

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Inspired by the limestone landscape outside Florence, Italy, where Auden and his longtime companion Chester Kallman (1921–1975) were staying; the poem also recalls the poet's native Yorkshire. In a letter to Elizabeth Mayer, Auden wrote: "I hadn't realised till I came how like Italy is to my 'Mutterland', the Pennines [hills in the north of England]. Am in fact starting on a poem, 'In Praise of Limestone', the theme of which is that rock creates the only truly human landscape."
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Narrow passages between houses (Yorkshire dialect) or, as here, rocks.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: *The Book of Common Prayer* is the liturgical book of the Anglican Church.[Return to reference 3](#)

Notes

- °: *penis*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *urchins*[Return to reference °](#)

The Shield of Achilles¹

5 She looked over his shoulder
For vines and olive trees,
Marble well-governed cities,
And ships upon untamed seas,
But there on the shining metal
His hands had put instead
An artificial wilderness
And a sky like lead.

10 A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.

15 Out of the air a voice without a face
Proved by statistics that some cause was just
In tones as dry and level as the place:
No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
Column by column in a cloud of dust
20 They marched away enduring a belief
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

25 She looked over his shoulder
For ritual pieties,
White flower-garlanded heifers,
Libation and sacrifice,²
But there on the shining metal
Where the altar should have been,

She saw by his flickering forge-light
Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
And sentries sweated, for the day was hot:
A crowd of ordinary decent folk
Watched from without and neither moved nor
spoke
As three pale figures were led forth and bound
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

40 The mass and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weighs the same,
Lay in the hands of others; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came:
What their foes liked to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.

45 She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
But there on the shining shield
50 His hands had set no dancing-floor
But a weed-choked field.

55 A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
 Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
 Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
 That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
 Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
 Of any world where promises were kept
 Or one could weep because another wept.

60 The thin-lipped armorer,
 Hephaestos, hobbled away;
 Thetis of the shining breasts
 Cried out in dismay
 At what the god had wrought
65 To please her son, the strong
 Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
 Who would not live long.

19521952, 1955

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles, the chief Greek hero in the war with Troy, lends his armor to his great friend Patroclus and loses it when Patroclus is killed by Hector. While Achilles is mourning the death of his friend, his mother, the goddess Thetis, goes to Mt. Olympus to beg Hephaestos, the god of fire, to forge new armor for Achilles. The splendid shield of Achilles that Hephaestos then makes is described in book 18 (lines 478–608). On it he depicts Earth, the heavens, the sea, and the planets; a city in peace (with a wedding and a trial) and a city at war; scenes from country life, animal life, and the joyful life of young men and women. The ocean, as the outer border, flows around all these scenes.
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820): "Who are these coming to the sacrifice? / To what green altar, O mysterious priest, / Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies, / And all her silken flanks with garlands dressed?" "Libation": sacrifice of wine or other liquid.
[Return to reference 2](#)

DYLAN THOMAS

1914–1953

Dylan Thomas was born in Swansea, Wales, and educated at Swansea Grammar School. After working for a time as a newspaper reporter, he was “discovered” as a poet in 1933 through a poetry contest in a popular newspaper. The following year his *Eighteen Poems* caused considerable excitement because of their powerfully suggestive obscurity and the strange violence of their imagery. It looked as though a new kind of visionary Romanticism had been restored to English poetry after the deliberately muted ironic tones of T. S. Eliot and his followers. Over time it became clear that Thomas was also a master of poetic craft, not merely a shouting rhapsodist. His verbal panache played against strict verse forms, such as the villanelle (“Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night”). “I am a painstaking, conscientious, involved and devious craftsman in words,” he wrote in his “Poetic Manifesto.” His images were carefully ordered in a patterned sequence, and his major theme was the unity of all life, the continuing *process* of life and death and new life that linked the generations. Thomas saw the workings of biology as a magical transformation producing unity out of diversity, and again and again in his poetry he sought a poetic ritual to celebrate this unity (“The force that through the green fuse drives the flower / Drives my green age”). He saw men and women locked in cycles of growth, love, procreation, new growth, death, and new life again. Hence each image engenders its opposite in what he called “my

dialectical method”: “Each image holds within it the seed of its own destruction.” Thomas derives his closely woven, sometimes self-contradictory images from the Bible, Welsh folklore and preaching, and Freud. In his poems of reminiscence and autobiographical emotion, such as “Poem in October,” he communicates more immediately through compelling use of lyrical feeling and simple natural images. His autobiographical work *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) and his radio play *Under Milk Wood* (1954) reveal a vividness of observation and a combination of violence and tenderness in expression that show he could handle prose as excitingly as verse.

Thomas was a brilliant talker, an alcoholic, and an impulsive man whose short life was packed with emotional ups and downs. His poetry readings in the United States between 1950 and 1953 were enormous successes, in spite of his sometimes reckless antics. He died suddenly in New York of what was diagnosed as “an insult to the brain,” precipitated by alcohol. He played the part of the wild bohemian poet, and while some thought this behavior wonderful, others deplored it. He was a stirring reader of his own and others’ poems, and many people who do not normally read poetry were drawn to Thomas’s by the magic of his own reading. After his premature death a reaction set in: some critics declared that he had been overrated as a poet because of his sensational life. The “Movement” poets, such as Philip Larkin, repudiated his rhetorical extravagance. Even so, Thomas is still considered an original poet of great power and beauty.

The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower

The force that through the green fuse drives the
flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.
5

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing
streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.
10

The hand that whirls the water in the pool¹
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.
And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.²
15

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.

And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.
20

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

Endnotes

- Note 1: The hand of the angel who troubles the water of the pool Bethesda, thus rendering it curative, in John 5:1–4.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Quicklime was sometimes poured into the graves of public hangmen's victims to accelerate decomposition.[Return to reference 2](#)

The Hunchback in the Park

5 The hunchback in the park
A solitary mister
Propped between trees and water
From the opening of the garden lock
That lets the trees and water enter
Until the Sunday sombre bell at dark¹

10 Eating bread from a newspaper
Drinking water from the chained cup
That the children filled with gravel
In the fountain basin where I sailed my ship
Slept at night in a dog kennel
But nobody chained him up.

15 Like the park birds he came early
Like the water he sat down
And Mister they called Hey mister
The truant boys from the town
Running when he had heard them clearly
On out of sound

20 Past lake and rockery^o
Laughing when he shook his paper
Hunchbacked in mockery
Through the loud zoo of the willow groves
Dodging the park keeper
With his stick that picked up leaves.

25 And the old dog sleeper
Alone between nurses and swans
While the boys among willows

30 Made the tigers jump out of their eyes
 To roar on the rockery stones
 And the groves were blue with sailors

35 Made all day until bell time
 A woman figure without fault
 Straight as a young elm
 Straight and tall from his crooked bones
 That she might stand in the night
 After the locks and chains

40 All night in the unmade park
 After the railings and shrubberies
 The birds the grass the trees the lake
 And the wild boys innocent as strawberries
 Had followed the hunchback
 To his kennel in the dark.

19411946

Endnotes

- Note 1: The bell indicates the park's closing for the night.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *rock garden*[Return to reference °](#)

Poem in October

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour
wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron
Priested shore
The morning beckon
5 With water praying and call of seagull and rook¹
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed
wall
Myself to set foot
That second
10 In the still sleeping town and set forth.
My birthday began with the water-
Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my
name
Above the farms and the white horses
And I rose
In rainy autumn
15 And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.
High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
Over the border
And the gates
20 Of the town closed as the town awoke.
A springful of larks in a rolling
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with
whistling
Blackbirds and the sun of October
Summery
On the hill's shoulder,

25 Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
To the rain wringing
Wind blow cold
30 In the wood faraway under me.

Pale rain over the dwindling harbour
And over the sea wet church the size of a snail
With its horns through mist and the castle
Brown as owls
But all the gardens
35 Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales
Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud.
There could I marvel
My birthday
40 Away but the weather turned around.

It turned away from the blithe country
And down the other air and the blue altered sky
Streamed again a wonder of summer
With apples
Pears and red currants
45 And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sun light
50 And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart
moved in mine.
These were the woods the river and sea
Where a boy
In the listening
55 Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his
joy

To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
And the mystery
Sang alive
Still in the water and singingbirds.
60
And there could I marvel my birthday
Away but the weather turned around. And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun.
It was my thirtieth
65 Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
Though the town below lay leaved with October
blood.
O may my heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.

70
19441946

Endnotes

- Note 1: A large type of crow.[Return to reference 1](#)

Fern Hill¹

Now as I was young and easy under the apple
boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was
green,
The night above the dingle² starry,
Time let me hail and climb
Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
5 And honoured among wagons I was prince of the
apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and
leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

10 And as I was green and carefree, famous among the
barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was
home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,
15 And green and golden I was huntsman and
herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear
and cold,
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

20 All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the
chimneys, it was air

And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.
And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm
away,
25 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables,
the night-jars³
Flying with the ricks,^o and the horses
Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer
white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder:
it was all
30 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,⁴
The sky gathered again
And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple
light
In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses
walking warm
35 Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the
gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart
was long,
In the sun born over and over,
40 I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time
allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning
songs
Before the children green and golden

45 Follow him out of grace,
Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time
would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my
hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
50 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless
land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his
means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

19451946

Endnotes

- Note 1: Name of the Welsh farmhouse, home of his aunt Ann Jones, where Thomas spent summer holidays as a boy.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Deep dell or hollow, usually wooded.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Species of bird.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See Genesis 1.[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *haystacks*[Return to reference °](#)

Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

5 Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

10 Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

15 Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

19511952

Voices from World War II

In December 1939, a few months after the start of World War II, a leading article in the *Times Literary Supplement* urged poets to do their duty: “it is for the poets to sound the trumpet call. . . . The monstrous threat to belief and freedom which we are fighting should urge new psalmists to fresh songs of deliverance.” The biblical diction reveals the underlying expectation that the poets of 1940 would come forward, like those of 1914, to sanctify the cause with images of sacrifice derived from Jesus Christ’s precedent and precept: “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Far from taking up trumpets, the poets responded bitterly—C. Day-Lewis with the poem “Where Are the War Poets?”:

They who in folly or mere greed
Enslaved religion, markets, laws,
Borrow our language now and bid
Us to speak up in freedom’s cause.

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse—
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse.

With few exceptions the British poets of the 1930s had been born shortly before the outbreak of World War I, and those who were to be the poets of World War II were born during that earlier conflict. They grew up not, as Rupert Brooke, in the sunlit peace of Georgian England but amid wars and rumors of wars. They lived through the Great Depression and the rise of fascism. Introduced to the horrors of the last war—increased to mythic proportions by their fathers, uncles, and elder brothers—they were continually reminded of it by a flood of best-selling battle memoirs: Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Siegfried

Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930) and Sherston's *Progress* (1936), and David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937). By then another myth, that of the Next War, was taking even more terrifying shape. Western intellectuals' last hope for the 1930s rested with the ragged troops of the left-wing Spanish Republic in their civil war against the right-wing Spanish army that had mutinied in 1936 against the country's elected government. Democracy and fascism were at last in the open, fighting a war that many thought would determine not simply the future of Spain but the future of Europe. With the final defeat of the Spanish Republicans in 1938, the Next War ceased to be a myth so much as an all-but-inescapable certainty.

World War I had been fought, for the most part, on the land, and its emblem in popular mythology was the trench. After the indiscriminate killing of civilians in a bombing raid—by German aircraft—on the Spanish town of Guernica in 1937, the emblem of the Next War was the bomb, the fire from heaven. Horrified by pictures of children bombed by Franco's fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War, Virginia Woolf was moved on the eve of World War II to write her long pacifist polemic, *Three Guineas* (1938). Subjecting nationalism to fierce irony and indicting the masculinist assertion of power, Woolf appealed for a cosmopolitanism, inflected by the experiences of women, in which one's country is the "whole world." In her diary she summed up what she considered her role as writer and intellectual in wartime: "Thinking is my fighting."

On September 1, 1939, Germany, in pursuit of imperial ambitions and without warning, launched a savage attack on Poland by land and air. Two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany. By the end of the month, Germany and its ally Russia had, between them, defeated and partitioned Poland. Russia then attacked Finland, and in April 1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. For Britain and France the period of inactivity that came to be known as "The Phoney War" ended in May, when the German army overran Luxembourg and invaded the Netherlands and Belgium; their armored columns raced for the English Channel. Cut off, the British forces were evacuated by sea, with heavy losses, from Dunkirk, and

in June, France signed an armistice with Germany. In August, as prelude to an invasion, the German *Luftwaffe* (air force) attacked England. Over the months that followed, the fighter pilots of the Royal Air Force (RAF) challenged the enemy bombers' nightly blitz of London and other major cities. The Battle of Britain, as it came to be called, cost the *Luftwaffe* twenty-three hundred planes, and the RAF, nine hundred. The losses forced the Germans to postpone their plans for invasion.



The dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, 1940. Despite some direct hits, St. Paul's stands in the midst of smoke and flames caused by the German air force's nightly bombing, or blitz, of London and other major British cities. On December 29, more than ten thousand incendiary bombs fell on the capital.

In 1941, Woolf imagined the coming fury, which would be a factor in her suicide. At the end of Woolf's novel *Between the Acts*,

the village pageant of English history is over, and Mr. Streatfield's speech of thanks is interrupted: "A zoom severed it. Twelve aeroplanes in perfect formation like a flight of wild duck came overhead." The following year Edith Sitwell depicted the blitz in "Still Falls the Rain," as did T. S. Eliot in part 2 of "Little Gidding." The Battle of Britain, however, was not the only battle, and British poets were already responding to war on land and at sea as well as in the air. The dominant mood of their poetry is strikingly unlike that from and about the trenches of the Western Front. Just as the heroics of 1914 were impossible in 1940 (although there was no lack of heroism), so too was the antipropagandist indignation of a Siegfried Sassoon. Now that everybody knew about the Battle of the Somme, the bombing of Guernica, London, and Dresden, who could be surprised by evidence of "Man's inhumanity to man"? In the draft preface to his poems, one of the more influential poetic manifestos of the twentieth century, Wilfred Owen had written: "All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful." His warnings and those of his contemporaries had been uttered in vain, but the poets and novelists of World War II knew they must be truthful, true to their wartime experience of boredom and brutality, true to their humanity, and above all resistant to the murderous inhumanity of the machines.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

In 1938, the year before the outbreak of full-blown war, when battles were already raging in Spain and Hitler's Nazism and Mussolini's fascism were extending their reach in Europe and Africa, Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* (see the introduction to Woolf [1882–1941] and the selection of her works earlier in this volume). In this long essay on war and gender, nationalism, and pacifism, she identifies the foundations of conflict in patriarchy and in the intimate connections among different forms of domination. Although Woolf doesn't believe that women are inherently pacifist, she argues that they must stand as ironic outsiders to the nationalism and militarism often mobilized, ostensibly, in their defense.

"This morning I got a packet of photographs from Spain, all of dead children, killed by bombs." So Woolf wrote to her nephew Julian Bell, on November 14, 1936. Within a year her nephew himself was dead, killed while driving an ambulance for the anti-fascist Republican forces in Spain. These war photographs and Bell's death, together with the pressure of the impending conflagration, spurred Woolf's meditation on war in relation to gender inequities and social power. The epistolary essay is written in the form of a freewheeling but hard-edged reply to a male correspondent who had asked her three years earlier, "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" He had also invited her to join a society for war's prevention. Refusing his overture, she argues for the feminist cosmopolitan who has the courage to say, "as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."

From Three Guineas

[AS A WOMAN I HAVE NO COUNTRY]

* * *

To begin with an elementary distinction: a society is a conglomeration of people joined together for certain aims; while you, who write in your own person with your own hand are single. You the individual are a man whom we have reason to respect; a man of the brotherhood, to which, as biography proves, many brothers have belonged. Thus Anne Clough,¹ describing her brother, says: "Arthur is my best friend and adviser. . . . Arthur is the comfort and joy of my life; it is for him, and from him, that I am incited to seek after all that is lovely and of good report." To which William Wordsworth, speaking of his sister but answering the other as if one nightingale called to another in the forests of the past, replies:

The Blessing of my later years
Was with me when a Boy:
She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy.²

Such was, such perhaps still is, the relationship of many brothers and sisters in private, as individuals. They respect each other and help each other and have aims in common. Why then, if such can be their private relationship, as biography and poetry prove, should their public relationship, as law and history prove, be so very different? And here, since you are a lawyer, with a lawyer's memory, it is not necessary to remind you of certain decrees of English law from its first records to the year 1919 by way of proving that the

public, the society relationship of brother and sister has been very different from the private. The very word "society" sets tolling in memory the dismal bells of a harsh music: shall not, shall not, shall not. You shall not learn; you shall not earn; you shall not own; you shall not—such was the society relationship of brother to sister for many centuries. And though it is possible, and to the optimistic credible, that in time a new society may ring a carillon³ of splendid harmony, and your letter heralds it, that day is far distant. Inevitably we ask ourselves, is there not something in the conglomeration of people into societies that releases what is most selfish and violent, least rational and humane in the individuals themselves? Inevitably we look upon society, so kind to you, so harsh to us, as an ill-fitting form that distorts the truth; deforms the mind; fetters the will. Inevitably we look upon societies as conspiracies that sink the private brother, whom many of us have reason to respect, and inflate in his stead a monstrous male, loud of voice, hard of fist, childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially; where, daubed red and gold, decorated like a savage with feathers he goes through mystic rites and enjoys the dubious pleasures of power and dominion while we, "his" women, are locked in the private house without share in the many societies of which his society is composed. For such reasons compact as they are of many memories and emotions—for who shall analyse the complexity of a mind that holds so deep a reservoir of time past within it?—it seems both wrong for us rationally and impossible for us emotionally to fill up your form and join your society. For by so doing we should merge our identity in yours; follow and repeat and score still deeper the old worn ruts in which society, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is grinding out with intolerable unanimity "Three hundred millions spent upon arms." We should not give effect to a view which our own experience of "society" should have helped us to envisage. Thus, Sir, while we respect you as a private person and prove it by giving you a guinea⁴ to spend as you choose, we believe that we can help you most effectively by refusing

to join your society; by working for our common ends—justice and equality and liberty for all men and women—outside your society, not within.

But this, you will say, if it means anything, can only mean that you, the daughters of educated men, who have promised us your positive help, refuse to join our society in order that you may make another of your own. And what sort of society do you propose to found outside ours, but in co-operation with it, so that we may both work together for our common ends? That is a question which you have every right to ask, and which we must try to answer in order to justify our refusal to sign the form you send. Let us then draw rapidly in outline the kind of society which the daughters of educated men might found and join outside your society but in co-operation with its ends. In the first place, this new society, you will be relieved to learn, would have no honorary treasurer, for it would need no funds. It would have no office, no committee, no secretary; it would call no meetings; it would hold no conferences. If name it must have, it could be called the Outsiders' Society. That is not a resonant name, but it has the advantage that it squares with facts—the facts of history, of law, of biography; even, it may be, with the still hidden facts of our still unknown psychology. It would consist of educated men's daughters working in their own class—how indeed can they work in any other?⁵ and by their own methods for liberty, equality and peace. Their first duty, to which they would bind themselves not by oath, for oaths and ceremonies have no part in a society which must be anonymous and elastic before everything, would be not to fight with arms. This is easy for them to observe, for in fact, as the papers inform us, "the Army Council have no intention of opening recruiting for any women's corps."⁶ The country ensures it. Next they would refuse in the event of war to make munitions or nurse the wounded. Since in the last war both these activities were mainly discharged by the daughters of working men, the pressure upon them here too would be slight, though probably disagreeable. On the other hand the next duty to which they would pledge themselves is one of considerable difficulty, and calls not only for

courage and initiative, but for the special knowledge of the educated man's daughter. It is, briefly, not to incite their brothers to fight, or to dissuade them, but to maintain an attitude of complete indifference. But the attitude expressed by the word "indifference" is so complex and of such importance that it needs even here further definition. Indifference in the first place must be given a firm footing upon fact. As it is a fact that she cannot understand what instinct compels him, what glory, what interest, what manly satisfaction fighting provides for him—"without war there would be no outlet for the manly qualities which fighting develops"—as fighting thus is a sex characteristic which she cannot share, the counterpart some claim of the maternal instinct which he cannot share, so is it an instinct which she cannot judge. The outsider therefore must leave him free to deal with this instinct by himself, because liberty of opinion must be respected, especially when it is based upon an instinct which is as foreign to her as centuries of tradition and education can make it.⁷ This is a fundamental and instinctive distinction upon which indifference may be based. But the outsider will make it her duty not merely to base her indifference upon instinct, but upon reason. When he says, as history proves that he has said, and may say again, "I am fighting to protect our country" and thus seeks to rouse her patriotic emotion, she will ask herself, "What does 'our country' mean to me an outsider?" To decide this she will analyse the meaning of patriotism in her own case. She will inform herself of the position of her sex and her class in the past. She will inform herself of the amount of land, wealth and property in the possession of her own sex and class in the present—how much of "England" in fact belongs to her. From the same sources she will inform herself of the legal protection which the law has given her in the past and now gives her. And if he adds that he is fighting to protect her body, she will reflect upon the degree of physical protection that she now enjoys when the words "Air Raid Precaution" are written on blank walls. And if he says that he is fighting to protect England from foreign rule, she will reflect that for her there are no "foreigners," since by law she becomes a foreigner if she

marries a foreigner. And she will do her best to make this a fact, not by forced fraternity, but by human sympathy. All these facts will convince her reason (to put it in a nutshell) that her sex and class has very little to thank England for in the past; not much to thank England for in the present; while the security of her person in the future is highly dubious. But probably she will have imbibed, even from the governess, some romantic notion that Englishmen, those fathers and grandfathers whom she sees marching in the picture of history, are "superior" to the men of other countries. This she will consider it her duty to check by comparing French historians with English; German with French; the testimony of the ruled—the Indians or the Irish, say—with the claims made by their rulers. Still some "patriotic" emotion, some ingrained belief in the intellectual superiority of her own country over other countries may remain. Then she will compare English painting with French painting; English music with German music; English literature with Greek literature, for translations abound. When all these comparisons have been faithfully made by the use of reason, the outsider will find herself in possession of very good reasons for her indifference. She will find that she has no good reason to ask her brother to fight on her behalf to protect "our" country. " 'Our country,' " she will say, "throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions. 'Our' country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner. 'Our' country denies me the means of protecting myself, forces me to pay others a very large sum annually to protect me, and is so little able, even so, to protect me that Air Raid precautions are written on the wall. Therefore if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or 'our' country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. For," the outsider will say, "in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." And if, when reason has said its say, still some obstinate emotion remains, some love of England dropped into a child's ears

by the cawing of rooks in an elm tree, by the splash of waves on a beach, or by English voices murmuring nursery rhymes, this drop of pure, if irrational, emotion she will make serve her to give to England first what she desires of peace and freedom for the whole world.

Such then will be the nature of her “indifference” and from this indifference certain actions must follow. She will bind herself to take no share in patriotic demonstrations; to assent to no form of national self-praise; to make no part of any [claque](#)⁸ or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose “our” civilization or “our” dominion upon other people. The psychology of private life, moreover, warrants the belief that this use of indifference by the daughters of educated men would help materially to prevent war. For psychology would seem to show that it is far harder for human beings to take action when other people are indifferent and allow them complete freedom of action, than when their actions are made the centre of excited emotion. The small boy struts and trumpets outside the window: implore him to stop; he goes on; say nothing; he stops. That the daughters of educated men then should give their brothers neither the white feather of cowardice nor the red feather of courage, but no feather at all; that they should shut the bright eyes that rain influence, or let those eyes look elsewhere when war is discussed—that is the duty to which outsiders will train themselves in peace before the threat of death inevitably makes reason powerless.

Such then are some of the methods by which the society, the anonymous and secret Society of Outsiders would help you, Sir, to prevent war and to ensure freedom.

* * *

Endnotes

- Note 1: British promoter of women's education and the first principal of Newnham College, Cambridge (1820–1892). Her brother was Arthur Clough (1819–1861), English poet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From "The Sparrows' Nest" by English poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850). His sister was Dorothy Wordsworth (1771–1855).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Melody played on bells.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A guinea is a gold coin worth a pound and a shilling; its name links it to the West African coast (a region once called Guinea) and the slave trade in which the coin originated. It was often the standard fee for subscription to a society.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:
In a lengthy note, Woolf describes the benefits to women of the working class and the educated class who dedicate themselves to improving the social and economic standing of their class. She warns against glamorizing the working class. "The average housewife," reports a newspaper article Woolf cites, "washed an acre of dirty dishes, a mile of glass and three miles of clothes and scrubbed miles of floor yearly" (*Daily Telegraph*, Sept. 29, 1937).
[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: "It was stated yesterday at the War Office that the Army Council have no intention of opening recruiting for any women's corps." (*The Times*, October 22, 1937 [p. 13]). This marks a prime distinction between the sexes. Pacifism is enforced upon women. Men are still allowed liberty of choice [*Woolf's note*].[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:
The following quotation shows, however, that if sanctioned the fighting instinct easily develops. "The eyes deeply sunk into the sockets, the features acute, the amazon keeps herself very

straight on the stirrups at the head of her squadron. . . . Five English parliamentaries look at this woman with the respectful and a bit restless admiration one feels for a 'fauve' of an unknown species. . . .

—Come nearer Amalia—orders the commandant. She pushes her horse towards us and salutes her chief with the sword.

—Sergeant Amalia Bonilla—continues the chief of the squadron—how old are you?—Thirty-six.—Where were you born?—In Granada.—Why have you joined the army?—My two daughters were militiawomen. The younger has been killed in the Alto de Leon. I thought I had to supersede her and avenge her.—And how many enemies have you killed to avenge her?—You know it, commandant, five. The sixth is not sure.—No, but you have taken his horse. The amazon Amalia rides in fact a magnificent dapple-grey horse, with glossy hair, which flatters like a parade horse. . . . This woman who has killed five men—but who feels not sure about the sixth—was for the envoys of the House of Commons an excellent introducer to the Spanish War." (*The Martyrdom of Madrid, Inedited Witnesses*, by Louis Delaprée, pp. 34, 5, 6. Madrid, 1937.) [Louis Delaprée (1902–1936) was a French journalist killed covering the Spanish Civil War; *Woolf's note*].

[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Group of subservient followers. [Return to reference 8](#)

PABLO PICASSO

Guernica

([p. 702](#))

Picasso painted the starkly black-white-and-gray, mural-size depiction of anguished and shattered human and animal figures after the German bombing and destruction of a Basque village in his native Spain in 1937. The attack by the warplanes in support of General Franco's Nationalist forces during the Civil War foreshadowed the widespread bombing of civilians in World War II. At the left of the painting, a woman mourns a dead child under a standing bull. At the center is a horse stabbed through by a spear and partly covered with newsprint; above the animal shines an eyelike light, and below it is the shattered body of a soldier. From the right, two female figures enter the room, one carrying a candle that contrasts with the harsh lightbulb, while a terrified person at the far right is surrounded by fire. The painting helped spread awareness of the Spanish Civil War's ravages, traveling to a large number of cities, including London, where it arrived in 1938 under the patronage in part of the novelists Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster.



Guernica, 1937, Pablo Picasso.

EDITH SITWELL

Edith Sitwell's father was an eccentric English baronet; her mother, the daughter of an earl. Sitwell (1887–1964), an eccentrically gifted poet, objected to the subdued rural descriptions and reflections of the Georgian poets (of whom Rupert Brooke was the most popular) and reacted in favor of a highly abstract verbal experimentation that exploited the sounds and rhythms and suggestions of words and phrases, often with remarkable pyrotechnic display. She edited and contributed to the six "cycles" of *Wheels* (1916–21), an annual anthology of modern poems in which she displayed her verbal and rhythmic virtuosity and encouraged others to follow her example. Her sequence *Façade* (1922), with its cunning exploration of rhymes and rhythms, was set to music by the composer Sir William Walton, whose sympathetic treatment of the words enhanced their impact. The 1923 performance in London's Aeolian Hall was a sensation: Sitwell intoned the poems from behind a screen, and Walton conducted the orchestra.

But Sitwell was more than a manipulator of surfaces. Throughout her poetry she hints at profounder meanings, sometimes with mocking laughter, sometimes with anguish, and in her later work she attacks the pettiness and philistinism of high society. In still later poems, influenced by William Blake, W. B. Yeats, and her friend Dylan Thomas, Sitwell wished to achieve, she said in her autobiography, "a greater expressiveness, a greater formality, and a return to rhetoric," rejecting "the outcry for understatement, for quietness, for neutral tints in poetry." These poems, such as "Still Falls the Rain," are much concerned with the horrors of war, the varieties of human suffering produced by modern civilization, and the healing powers of a faith in God, combined with a sense of the richness and variety of nature.

Still Falls the Rain

The Raids, 1940.¹ Night and Dawn

Still falls the Rain—
Dark as the world of man, black as our loss—
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails
Upon the Cross.

5 Still falls the Rain
With a sound like the pulse of the heart that is
changed to the hammer-beat
In the Potter's Field,² and the sound of the impious
feet
On the Tomb:
Still falls the Rain
In the Field of Blood where the small hopes breed
and the human brain
Nurtures its greed, that worm with the brow of
10 Cain.³

Still falls the Rain
At the feet of the Starved Man hung upon the Cross.
Christ that each day, each night, nails there, have
mercy on us—
On Dives and on Lazarus.⁴
15 Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one.

Still falls the Rain—
Still falls the Blood from the Starved Man's wounded
Side:
He bears in His Heart all wounds,—those of the light
that died,

20 The last faint spark
In the self-murdered heart, the wounds of the sad
 uncomprehending dark,
The wounds of the baited bear,⁵—
The blind and weeping bear whom the keepers beat
On his helpless flesh . . . the tears of the hunted
 hare.

25 Still falls the Rain—
Then—O Ile leape up to my God: who pulles me
 doune—
See, see where Christ's blood streames in the
 firmament:⁶
It flows from the Brow we nailed upon the tree
Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart
That holds the fires of the world,—dark-smirched
 with pain
30 As Caesar's laurel crown.⁷

Then sounds the voice of One who like the heart of
 man
Was once a child who among beasts has lain—
"Still do I love, still shed my innocent light, my
 Blood, for thee."

1942

Endnotes

- Note 1: During the Battle of Britain, the German air force carried out many raids on London, often with incendiary bombs (see lines 27 and 30). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
See Matthew 27:3–8: "Then Judas, which betrayed [Jesus], when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and

elders, saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? see thou to it. And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the pieces of silver . . . and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day."

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The first murderer in the Bible (Genesis 4).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In Jesus's parable the rich man Dives was sent to hell, while the leprous beggar Lazarus went to heaven (Luke 16:19–31). This is not the same Lazarus who was raised from the dead.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A medieval and Elizabethan sport in which dogs fought a bear chained to a post.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Faustus's cry at the end of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604), when he realizes that he has been damned for his pact with Mephistopheles.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Traditionally worn by victorious generals, and perhaps here associated with Jesus's crown of thorns (Matthew 27:29).[Return to reference 7](#)

HENRY REED

Henry Reed (1914–1986) was born and educated in Birmingham, at the King Edward VI School and at Birmingham University, where he gained a first-class degree in classics (having taught himself Greek) and began an M.A. thesis on Thomas Hardy. After leaving the university in 1934, he tried teaching, like other British writers of the 1930s, but, like most of them, hated it and left to make his way as a freelance writer and critic. During World War II he served—or rather *studied*,” as he put it—in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps for a year. A notable mimic, he entertained friends with a comic imitation of a sergeant instructing new recruits. After a few performances he noticed that the words of the weapon-training instructor, couched in the style of the military manual, fell into certain rhythmic patterns. His fascination with these patterns eventually informed his *Lessons of the War*, the first of which, “Naming of Parts,” is probably the most anthologized poem prompted by World War II.

From 1942 to 1945, Reed worked as a cryptographer and translator at the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley. In the evenings he wrote much of his first radio play—an adaptation of Melville’s *Moby-Dick*—and many of the poems to be published in *A Map of Verona* (1946). After the war, he produced a number of other successful—and often funny—radio plays, verse translations of the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), and more poems. Many of the best of these were found in manuscript at his death, and with the posthumous publication of his *Collected Poems* (1991), he emerged as a writer whose lifelong quest for lasting homosexual love—which he never found—led him through Edenic landscapes of desire, like the setting of “Naming of Parts.”

From Lessons of the War

To Alan Michell

Vixi duellis nuper idoneus
Et militavi non sine gloria¹

1. Naming of Parts

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning,
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica²
5 Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens,
And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
When you are given your slings. And this is the piling
swivel,
10 Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not
let me
15 See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The
blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this

20 Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it
 Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this
 Easing the spring.³ And rapidly backwards and
 forwards
 The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the
 flowers:
 They call it easing the Spring.

25 They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly easy
 If you have any strength in your thumb; like the bolt,
 And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point
 of balance,
 Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-
 blossom
 Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going
 backwards and forwards,
 For today we have naming of parts.

30

1945

Endnotes

- Note 1: “Lately I have lived in the midst of battles, creditably enough, / and have soldiered, not without glory” (Horace’s *Odes* 3.26.1–2, with the *p* of *puellis*—girls—turned upside down to produce *duellis*—battles; an emendation that encapsulates the theme of the *Lessons*).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A shrub with brilliant scarlet flowers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ejecting the bullets from the magazine of a rifle takes the pressure off the magazine spring.[Return to reference 3](#)

ELIZABETH BOWEN

Elizabeth Bowen (1899–1973) was a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry, a wealthy class descended from English Protestants in Ireland. They culturally identified with England, which led to tension with Irish Catholics, who supported the independence of Ireland. Bowen lived between Dublin and her family's country home in County Cork until the age of seven when, following her father's struggle with mental illness, she moved to London with her mother. At age thirteen, the loss of her mother to cancer led her to live with relatives. She began writing short stories at the age of twenty. She is the author of ten novels, the second of which, *The Last September* (1929), brought her early critical attention and praise. Set in a great Irish country house, modeled on her home in Cork, it chronicles the decline of an Anglo-Irish family against the backdrop of the Irish War of Independence. Bowen's later novels and short story collections drew inspiration from the political upheaval of World War II. *The Heat of the Day* (1949) is a tale of espionage and intrigue featuring two spies turned lovers, and *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (1945) draws on supernatural imagery to represent the surreality of wartime experience in which death felt inescapable and ghosts closer than the living. Bowen worked for the English Ministry of Information during the war, and is as renowned for her wartime journalism as she is for her substantial body of fiction. "The Demon Lover," set during the Blitz (German air attacks on England), features a woman returning to her abandoned London home where she discovers a letter from her former fiancé. The letter triggers disturbing memories, and spurs the woman toward an ambiguous, but terrifying, encounter, made more frightening by the empty streets of wartime London.

The Demon Lover

Towards the end of her day in London Mrs. Drover went round to her shut-up house to look for several things she wanted to take away. Some belonged to herself, some to her family, who were by now used to their country life. It was late August; it had been a steamy, showery day: at the moment the trees down the pavement glittered in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun. Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets stood out. In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness had silted up; a cat wove itself in and out of railings, but no human eye watched Mrs. Drover's return. Shifting some parcels under her arm, she slowly forced round her latchkey in an unwilling lock, then gave the door, which had warped, a push with her knee. Dead air came out to meet her as she went in.

The staircase window having been boarded up, no light came down into the hall. But one door, she could just see, stood ajar, so she went quickly through into the room and unshuttered the big window in there. Now the prosaic woman, looking about her, was more perplexed than she knew by everything that she saw, by traces of her long former habit of life—the yellow smoke-stain up the white marble mantelpiece, the ring left by a vase on the top of the *escritoire*;¹ the bruise in the wallpaper where, on the door being thrown open widely, the china handle had always hit the wall. The piano, having gone away to be stored, had left what looked like claw-marks on its part of the parquet. Though not much dust had seeped in, each object wore a film of another kind; and, the only ventilation being the chimney, the whole drawing-room smelled of the cold hearth. Mrs. Drover put down her parcels on the *escritoire* and left the room to proceed upstairs; the things she wanted were in a bedroom chest.

She had been anxious to see how the house was—the part-time caretaker she shared with some neighbours was away this week on his holiday, known to be not yet back. At the best of times he did not look in often, and she was never sure that she trusted him. There were some cracks in the structure, left by the last bombing,² on which she was anxious to keep an eye. Not that one could do anything—

A shaft of refracted daylight now lay across the hall. She stopped dead and stared at the hall table—on this lay a letter addressed to her.

She thought first—then the caretaker *must* be back. All the same, who, seeing the house shuttered, would have dropped a letter in at the box? It was not a circular, it was not a bill. And the post office redirected, to the address in the country, everything for her that came through the post. The caretaker (even if he *were* back) did not know she was due in London to-day—her call here had been planned to be a surprise—so his negligence in the manner of this letter, leaving it to wait in the dusk and the dust, annoyed her. Annoyed, she picked up the letter, which bore no stamp. But it cannot be important, or they would know . . . She took the letter rapidly upstairs with her, without a stop to look at the writing till she reached what had been her bedroom, where she let in light. The room looked over the garden and other gardens: the sun had gone in; as the clouds sharpened and lowered, the trees and rank lawns seemed already to smoke with dark. Her reluctance to look again at the letter came from the fact that she felt intruded upon—and by someone contemptuous of her ways. However, in the tenseness preceding the fall of rain she read it: it was a few lines.

DEAR KATHLEEN,

You will not have forgotten that to-day is our anniversary, and the day we said. The years have gone by at once slowly and fast. In view of the fact that nothing has changed, I shall rely upon you to keep your promise. I was sorry to see you leave London, but was

satisfied that you would be back in time. You may expect me, therefore, at the hour arranged.

Until then . . .

K.

Mrs. Drover looked for the date: it was to-day's. She dropped the letter on to the bed-springs, then picked it up to see the writing again—her lips, beneath the remains of lipstick, beginning to go white. She felt so much the change in her own face that she went to the mirror, polished a clear patch in it and looked at once urgently and stealthily in. She was confronted by a woman of forty-four, with eyes starting out under a hat-brim that had been rather carelessly pulled down. She had not put on any more powder since she left the shop where she ate her solitary tea. The pearls her husband had given her on their marriage hung loose round her now rather thinner throat, slipping into the V of the pink wool jumper her sister knitted last autumn as they sat round the fire. Mrs. Drover's most normal expression was one of controlled worry, but of assent. Since the birth of the third of her little boys, attended by a quite serious illness, she had had an intermittent muscular flicker to the left of her mouth, but in spite of this she could always sustain a manner that was at once energetic and calm.

Turning from her own face as precipitately as she had gone to meet it, she went to the chest where the things were, unlocked it, threw up the lid and knelt to search. But as rain began to come crashing down she could not keep from looking over her shoulder at the stripped bed on which the letter lay. Behind the blanket of rain the clock of the church that still stood struck six—with rapidly heightening apprehension she counted each of the slow strokes. 'The hour arranged . . . My God,' she said, '*what* hour? How should I . . . ? After twenty-five years. . . '

The young girl talking to the soldier in the garden had not ever completely seen his face. It was dark; they were saying good-bye under a tree. Now and then—for it felt, from not seeing him at this intense moment, as though she had never seen him at all—she

verified his presence for these few moments longer by putting out a hand, which he each time pressed, without very much kindness, and painfully, on to one of the breast buttons of his uniform. That cut of the button on the palm of her hand was, principally, what she was to carry away. This was so near the end of a leave from France that she could only wish him already gone. It was August 1916. Being not kissed, being drawn away from and looked at intimidated Kathleen till she imagined spectral glitters in the place of his eyes. Turning away and looking back up the lawn she saw, through branches of trees, the drawing-room window alight: she caught a breath for the moment when she could go running back there into the safe arms of her mother and sister, and cry: 'What shall I do, what shall I do? He has gone.'

Hearing her catch her breath, her fiancé said, without feeling: 'Cold?'

'You're going away such a long way.'

'Not so far as you think.'

'I don't understand?'

'You don't have to,' he said. 'You will. You know what we said.'

'But that was—suppose you—I mean, suppose.'

'I shall be with you,' he said, 'sooner or later. You won't forget that. You need do nothing but wait.'

Only a little more than a minute later she was free to run up the silent lawn. Looking in through the window at her mother and sister, who did not for the moment perceive her, she already felt that unnatural promise drive down between her and the rest of all human kind. No other way of having given herself could have made her feel so apart, lost and foresworn. She could not have plighted a more sinister troth.³

Kathleen behaved well when, some months later, her fiancé was reported missing, presumed killed. Her family not only supported her but were able to praise her courage without stint because they could not regret, as a husband for her, the man they knew almost nothing about. They hoped she would, in a year or two, console herself—and had it been only a question of consolation things might have gone

much straighter ahead. But her trouble, behind just a little grief, was a complete dislocation from everything. She did not reject other lovers, for these failed to appear: for years she failed to attract men—and with the approach of her 'thirties she became natural enough to share her family's anxiousness on this score. She began to put herself out, to wonder; and at thirty-two she was very greatly relieved to find herself being courted by William Drover. She married him, and the two of them settled down in this quiet, arboreal part of Kensington: in this house the years piled up, her children were born and they all lived till they were driven out by the bombs of the next war. Her movements as Mrs. Drover were circumscribed, and she dismissed any idea that they were still watched.

As things were—dead or living the letter-writer sent her only a threat. Unable, for some minutes, to go on kneeling with her back exposed to the empty room, Mrs. Drover rose from the chest to sit on an upright chair whose back was firmly against the wall. The desuetude⁴ of her former bedroom, her married London home's whole air of being a cracked cup from which memory, with its reassuring power, had either evaporated or leaked away, made a crisis—and at just this crisis the letter-writer had, knowledgeably, struck. The hollowness of the house this evening cancelled years on years of voices, habits and steps. Through the shut windows she only heard rain fall on the roofs around. To rally herself, she said she was in a mood—and, for two or three seconds shutting her eyes, told herself that she had imagined the letter. But she opened them—there it lay on the bed.

On the supernatural side of the letter's entrance she was not permitting her mind to dwell. Who, in London, knew she meant to call at the house to-day? Evidently, however, this has been known. The caretaker, *had* he come back, had had no cause to expect her: he would have taken the letter in his pocket, to forward it, at his own time, through the post. There was no other sign that the caretaker had been in—but, if not? Letters dropped in at doors of deserted houses do not fly or walk to tables in halls. They do not sit on the dust of empty tables with the air of certainty that they will be

found. There is needed some human hand—but nobody but the caretaker had a key. Under circumstances she did not care to consider, a house can be entered without a key. It was possible that she was not alone now. She might be being waited for, downstairs. Waited for—until when? Until ‘the hour arranged’. At least that was not six o’clock: six has struck.

She rose from the chair and went over and locked the door.

The thing was, to get out. To fly? No, not that: she had to catch her train. As a woman whose utter dependability was the keystone of her family life she was not willing to return to the country, to her husband, her little boys and her sister, without the objects she had come up to fetch. Resuming work at the chest she set about making up a number of parcels in a rapid, fumbling-decisive way. These, with her shopping parcels, would be too much to carry; these meant a taxi—at the thought of the taxi her heart went up and her normal breathing resumed. I will ring up the taxi now; the taxi cannot come too soon: I shall hear the taxi out there running its engine, till I walk calmly down to it through the hall. I’ll ring up—But no: the telephone is cut off . . . She tugged at a knot she had tied wrong.

The idea of flight . . . He was never kind to me, not really. I don’t remember him kind at all. Mother said he never considered me. He was set on me, that was what it was—not love. Not love, not meaning a person well. What did he do, to make me promise like that? I can’t remember—But she found that she could.

She remembered with such dreadful acuteness that the twenty-five years since then dissolved like smoke and she instinctively looked for the weal left by the button on the palm of her hand. She remembered not only all that he said and did but the complete suspension of *her* existence during that August week. I was not myself—they all told me so at the time. She remembered—but with one white burning blank as where acid has dropped on a photograph: *under no conditions* could she remember his face.

So, wherever he may be waiting, I shall not know him. You have no time to run from a face you do not expect.

The thing was to get to the taxi before any clock struck what could be the hour. She would slip down the street and round the side of the square to where the square gave on the main road. She would return in the taxi, safe, to her own door, and bring the solid driver into the house with her to pick up the parcels from room to room. The idea of the taxi driver made her decisive, bold: she unlocked her door, went to the top of the staircase and listened down.

She heard nothing—but while she was hearing nothing the *passé*⁵ air of the staircase was disturbed by a draught that travelled up to her face. It emanated from the basement: down there a door or window was being opened by someone who chose this moment to leave the house.

The rain had stopped; the pavements steamily shone as Mrs. Drover let herself out by inches from her own front door into the empty street. The unoccupied houses opposite continued to meet her look with their damaged stare. Making towards the thoroughfare and the taxi, she tried not to keep looking behind. Indeed, the silence was so intense—one of those creeks of London silence exaggerated this summer by the damage of war—that no tread could have gained on hers unheard. Where her street debouched on the square where people went on living, she grew conscious of, and checked, her unnatural pace. Across the open end of the square two buses impassively passed each other: women, a perambulator,⁶ cyclists, a man wheeling a barrow signaled, once again, the ordinary flow of life. At the square's most populous corner should be—and was—the short taxi rank. This evening, only one taxi—but this, although it presented its blank rump, appeared already to be alertly waiting for her. Indeed, without looking round the driver started his engine as she panted up from behind and put her hand on the door. As she did so, the clock struck seven. The taxi faced the main road: to make the trip back to her house it would have to turn—she had settled back on the seat and the taxi *had* turned before she, surprised by its knowing movement, recollected that she had

not 'said where'. She leaned forward to scratch at the glass panel that divided the driver's head from her own.

The driver braked to what was almost a stop, turned round and slid the glass panel back: the jolt of this flung Mrs. Drover forward till her face was almost into the glass. Through the aperture driver and passenger, not six inches between them, remained for an eternity eye to eye. Mrs. Drover's mouth hung open for some seconds before she could issue her first scream. After that she continued to scream freely and to beat with her gloved hands on the glass all round as the taxi, accelerating without mercy, made off with her into the hinterland of deserted streets.

1945

Endnotes

- Note 1: Small writing desk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Reference to the Blitz, a German bombing campaign against the United Kingdom in World War II focused on London and other large cities and industrial targets.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A promise of marriage.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: To fall into disuse or be discontinued.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Dated, worn, disused (from French for *past*).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Baby carriage (British English).[Return to reference 6](#)

Nation, Race, and Language

Armies and navies, cannons and guns helped spread and consolidate British rule across vast areas of Earth's surface, but so too did the English language. Over many years, in various parts of the world, the language of the British Empire displaced or commingled with indigenous languages. Then the twentieth century witnessed the decolonization and devolution of the British Empire—from early-century Ireland; to mid-century South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean; to late-century Hong Kong. Those under colonial rule were often made to feel inferior because they had “a different complexion or slightly flatter noses,” as Conrad's Marlow puts it in *Heart of Darkness*. When large numbers of non-White immigrants arrived in England after World War II, they were likely to find themselves stigmatized and discriminated against because of their race. Imaginative writers from the former colonies, as well as immigrants to Britain and their children, have thus had to wrestle with questions of nation, race, and language. Should they write stories, plays, and poems in the language and traditions of the colonizer, or should they repudiate English and return to their indigenous languages? Is English an enabling tool by which peoples of different races and nationalities can express their identities, or is it contaminated by a colonial history and racist mentality that it insidiously perpetuates? If English is chosen for imaginative writing, should it be the Standardized English of the imperial center or an English inflected by contact with indigenous languages—creole, patois, or pidgin? Since the power of the United States has sustained the global reach of English long after the withdrawal of British colonial armies and administrators, debates over such questions have persisted in many parts of the world where English still thrives in the aftermath of a dead empire.

Postwar immigrants to Britain from its former colonies have also brought these once faraway issues home to the “mother country.” On

June 21, 1948, the first shipload of Caribbean immigrants, 492 passengers onboard the *Empire Windrush*, arrived at Tilbury Docks, near London. Many other Black and Asian immigrants from the Caribbean, from Asia, and from Africa soon followed, diversifying Britain until peoples of ethnic minorities made up 12.9 percent of the total population in 2011. Between the 1948 British Nationality Act, which allowed British subjects to immigrate, and the 1968 measure limiting immigration to citizens of British (that is, White) family origin, hundreds of thousands of Blacks and Asians were “colonizin / Englan in reverse,” in Jamaican poet Louise Bennett’s witty phrase.



The *Windrush* arrives, June 21, 1948. The *Empire Windrush* brought 492 passengers from Kingston, Jamaica, to Tilbury Docks, near London. Since Britain had just passed the 1948 British Nationality Act that granted citizenship to colonial subjects, West Indians sailed to Britain, many in search of job opportunities. Although they met with discrimination upon arrival, a large number of the Caribbean migrants stayed, becoming the

first members of what is sometimes called “the *Windrush* generation.”

Assuming they would be welcomed as full-fledged British subjects, many of these immigrants, arriving in search of jobs and educational opportunities, were surprised by the racial discrimination they encountered. Bearing with them the dream England of Shakespeare, public monuments, and English civilization, many of these immigrants were refused housing because of their race and consigned to jobs below their skill level. In “Inglan Is a Bitch,” Black British poet Linton Kwesi Johnson relates the job woes of one such hapless immigrant. These exclusionary racial attitudes were also felt by immigrant writers. Jamaican playwright and poet Una Marson reflects on the violation of hearing a racial epithet “flung” at her speaker in “Nigger.” It is in this context that Salman Rushdie asserts the British Indian’s right to lay claim to full membership in British society and to British, Indian, and a variety of transnational literary inheritances. From a “black” perspective, Daljit Nagra retells the *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, as Winston Churchill titled his monumental chronicle, to make room for an Asian Briton’s ambivalent participation in that history, as an insider-outsider who reinhabits an English literary canon centered on Shakespeare. Bernardine Evaristo goes back even further in time in *The Emperor’s Babe*, to the third century C.E., when African diasporic people like her were already living in Roman Londinium, contrary to the widespread misconception that Britain was racially homogeneous before 1948. Unmoored from the “calypso ways” of her native Guyana and feeling displaced in England’s “misty greyness,” immigrant poet Grace Nichols nevertheless declares, “Wherever I hang me knickers—that’s my home.” In her view, the new creolized English tongue she and other African Caribbeans have created after losing their African languages is a kind of linguistic home: “from the root of the old one / a new one has sprung.” East Indian writer Samuel Selvon, who was raised in the West Indies before moving to England, writes about

Black men's resettlement with gentle humor and awareness of their vulnerability.

Such issues of nation, race, and language have a deep history in Britain's colonies, and not only its far-flung possessions in the global South. Irish immigrants to Britain had long found themselves discriminated against as racial "others." In Ireland itself, the British, having tried to subdue the local people for centuries, outlawed the use of the Irish language (or Gaelic). Because of Ireland's long and bloody colonial history and the flowering there of cultural nationalism, early-twentieth-century Irish writers were already expressing a powerful ambivalence toward English as both a vital literary inheritance and the language of colonial subjugation. Recalling the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English "wars of extermination" against the Irish, W. B. Yeats acknowledges a historical hatred of the English but then reminds himself that, as an English-language writer, "I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate" (see his "Introduction," excerpted in this volume). In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce's autobiographical persona, Stephen Dedalus, reflects on his conversation with an academic dean, an Englishman: "The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. . . . I cannot speak or write these [English] words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language." Yet despite this vexed relation to the language, Yeats and Joyce wrote some of the most innovative English-language poetry and fiction of the twentieth century, ultimately influencing the very language that had so troubled them. Indeed, their conflicted relation to the English language and its literary inheritance—that "unrest of spirit" in its shadow—may, paradoxically, have impelled their massive literary achievements.



The BBC *Voice* radio program. Sitting in a recording studio in 1942 from left to right are Venu Chitale, M. J. Tambimuttu, T. S. Eliot, Una Marson, Mulk Raj Anand, Christopher Pemberton, and Narayana Menon. Standing are George Orwell, Nancy Barratt, and William Empson. This diverse set of writers collaborated on a poetry series that was broadcast to India on the BBC's Eastern Service. Radio programs such as *Voice* served as a cultural arm of the British Empire by connecting colonial audiences to England.

Transplanted to different parts of the world, English has sometimes seemed strange and estranging. When African and Caribbean schoolchildren with British colonial educations tried to write poems, as Kamau Brathwaite and other writers have attested, they would follow the conventions of English poetry, composing iambic pentameter verse about snowfall or daffodils, which they had never seen. English language and literature thus risked alienating colonized peoples from their local environments and distinctive cultural histories. The African Caribbean–Canadian poet M. NourbeSe

Philip writes of English as a “mother tongue” that is also a strangely violent and patriarchal “father tongue,” used for the brutal suppression of her slave ancestors.

The feeling that the English language is alienating, inextricably bound to colonialism, has led some nativist writers, such as the Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, to reject it outright. If language is a “collective memory bank,” then a people cannot recover its colonially suppressed identity and history without returning to an indigenous language. But the novelist Salman Rushdie, who often writes in an Indianized, or “chutnified,” English, takes the opposite stance: “The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago,” he asserts. English has become a local language even in parts of the world, such as India, where it was once imposed by colonial rulers. Rushdie and other cosmopolitan writers reject the assumption that the English language has an inherent relationship to only one kind of national or racial experience. “The English language is nobody’s special property,” asserts the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott.

For the colonial, postcolonial, or immigrant writer who embraces English, the question remains, Which English? The imported Standardized English or a local vernacular? Or if both, should they be intermingled or kept apart? At one end of the spectrum are writers, such as Wole Soyinka and V. S. Naipaul, who think Standardized English, perhaps slightly altered, can bespeak a postcolonial experience of race, identity, and history. At the other end are vernacular writers who feel that the language of the center cannot do justice to their experience at the margins of empire. Louise Bennett, for example, gives voice to everyday Jamaican experience in her witty and wily use of Jamaican Creole, or patois; she mocks its denigration as a “corruption of the English language,” pointing out that Standardized English is itself but an amalgam of dialects and foreign languages. “It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master,” Kamau Brathwaite has written, “and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled.” Linton Kwesi Johnson graphically emphasizes his

resistance to the norms of Standardized English by his phonetic (mis-)spelling of English words.

Between the Standardized English writer and the vernacular writer range a host of fiction writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Caryl Phillips, and Zadie Smith, and poets, such as Walcott, Brathwaite, and Nichols, who switch between standard and “dialect” within or across individual works, creating juxtapositions, tensions, and new relationships between languages that have traditionally been kept hierarchically discrete. They linguistically embody their interstitial experience of living in between metropolis and margin, canon and creole, schoolbooks and the street.

Whether using slightly or heavily creolized English, or a medley of the two, writers from across the world—Barbadians and Bengalis and Black Britons—have employed a diverse array of distinctive idioms, dialects, and creoles to defy imperial norms, express emerging cultural identities, and inaugurate rich new possibilities for literature in English.

UNA MARSON

Una Marson (1905–1965) was born in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, a rural area on the southwest of the island. Her father was a well-respected preacher and influenced Marson's trajectory as a literary writer, journalist, and political activist. She earned a scholarship to attend Hampton High School, a predominantly White boarding school in Jamaica modeled on the English public school. Hampton introduced her to the canon of British literature and to overt and covert racism, which would follow her throughout her life. Marson began writing poetry and plays in Jamaica. The money she earned from her first play, *At What a Price* (pub. 1933), allowed her to travel to England in 1932, where she became the first colonial person of color to stage a play in London.

Marson's other plays include *London Calling* (1937) and *Pocomania* (1938), the latter of which became an influential early work of Jamaican theater. She published four poetry collections, which make use of traditional forms and straightforward verse to capture the experience of being Black and female in environments where one feels both invisible and hypervisible. She published the protest poem "Nigger" (1933) in *The Keys*, the newspaper of the League of Coloured Peoples, a civil rights group working toward racial equality for Black peoples in Britain. The poem captures the anger and pain inflicted by the racial epithet, and the movements of pronouns from "They" to "We" across stanzas emphasize the divisions sewn by the slur. "The Stranger," from Marson's collection *The Moth and the Star* (1937), offers a surprising twist on the dramatic monologue, as Marson combines two voices in the poem. The primary speaker is a Black woman, and she recounts a conversation with a White love interest who she thinks is drawn to her out of a desire for the exotic.

Marson lived in London from 1932 until 1936, but returned to Jamaica for a year in response to suffering from anxiety and

depression. When she returned to England, she took a job with the BBC and assisted on the radio show *Calling the West Indies*, which began in 1939 as a venue for West Indian soldiers fighting in World War II to read letters home to their families. Despite enduring racial discrimination and social isolation at the BBC, Marson rose to the position of producer and created the radio show *Caribbean Voices*, which would evolve into a major organ for the development of West Indian literature.

Nigger

They called me "Nigger"
Those little white urchins.
They laughed and shouted
As I passed along the street,
They flung it at me:
5 "Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!"

What made me keep my fingers
From choking the words in their throats?
What made my face grow hot,
The blood boil in my veins
10 And tears spring to my eyes?
What made me go to my room
And sob my heart away
Because white urchins
Called me "Nigger"?
15

What makes the dark West Indian¹
Fight at being called a Nigger?
What is there in a word
That should strike like a dagger
To the heart of Coloured men
20 And make them wince?

You of the white skinned Race,
You who profess such innocence,
I'll tell you why 'tis a sin to tell
Your offspring Coloured folks are queer,
25 Black men are bogies² and inferior far
To any creature with a skin made white.

30 You who feel that you are "sprung
Of earth's first blood",³ your eyes
Are blinded now with arrogance.
With ruthlessness you seared
My people's flesh, and now you still
Would crush their very soul,
Add fierce insult to vilest injury.

35 We will not be called "Niggers"
Since this was the favourite curse
Of those who drove the Negroes
To their death in days of slavery.
"A good for nothing Nigger",
40 "Only one more Nigger gone"
They would repeat as though
He were a chicken or a rat.
That word then meant contempt,
All that was low and base,
45 And too refined for lower animals.

In later years when singing Negroes
Caused white men to laugh,
And show some interest in their art
They talked of "Nigger Minstrels"⁴
And patronised the Negro,
50 And laughing at his songs
They could nowise see
The thorns that pierced his heart.
"Nigger" was raised then to a Burlesque Show⁵
And thus from Curse to Clown progressed
55 A coloured man was cause for merriment.
And though to-day he soars in every field
Some shrunken souls still say
"Look at that Nigger there
As though they saw a green bloodhound
Or a pink puppy.

60 God keep my soul from hating such mean souls,
 God keep my soul from hating
 Those who preach the Christ
 And say with churlish smile
 "This place is not for 'Niggers'."
65 God save their souls from this great sin
 Of hurting human hearts that live
 And think and feel in unison
 With all humanity.

1933

Endnotes

- Note 1: Inhabitant or native of the West Indies, a historical term for the islands of the Caribbean.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An evil spirit or specter.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Line from William Wordsworth's patriotic sonnet "It is not to be thought of" (1815). It bears themes of racial and linguistic supremacy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Entertainment popular in the 19th and early 20th century United States that was founded on racial stereotypes and commonly featured troupes of White actors, musicians, and dancers in blackface.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Variety shows based on parody and featuring bawdy comedy and stripteases.[Return to reference 5](#)

The Stranger

You liked talking to people like me
You said, with a wistful smile
That enchanted me, so the pause
That came before I spoke
5 Must have seemed strange to you,
And when I returned the compliment
So sweetly made, I still thought
Of the wistfulness of your smile.

So you like talking to people like me,
10 Friend with the wistful smile,
To foreign girls who are brown of skin
And have black kinky hair
And have strange black eyes.

You like to hear the tales I tell
15 Of a tropic Paradise,
Of sunkissed woods and mountains high
Of skies that are bluer than ever
Skies are blue in your nordic clime:
Of magic sunsets and marvellous seas,
20 Of waterfalls clattering down,
Stars so near, and the moon so large,
And fireflies, stars of the earth.

I like to listen to you,
Friend with the wistful smile.
25 It's not to hear of your great country
And tales of your marvellous land,
But to watch the wistful smile
That plays around your mouth,

The strange look in your eyes
And hear the calm sweet tone of your voice.

LOUISE BENNETT

Louise Bennett (1919–2006), the preeminent West Indian poet of Creole verse, was born and grew up in Kingston, Jamaica, in the British West Indies, her mother a dressmaker, her father a baker. After she had published her first book of poetry, *Dialect Verses* (1942), she attended London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. As "Miss Lou" she won a mass following in the Caribbean through her vibrant stage performances of her poetry and of folk song; her weekly "dialect" poems published from 1943 in Jamaica's national newspaper, the *Gleaner*; her radio show, "Miss Lou's Views" (1966–82); and her children's television program, "Ring Ding" (1970–82).

Bennett helped dismantle the view that Jamaican English is a corruption of Standardized English, a prejudice she lambasted in radio monologues such as "Jamaica Language" and in poems such as "Dry-Foot Bwoy," which humorously juxtaposes a metaphor-rich Creole with a hollowly imitative British English. From a young age she felt that the humor, wit, and vigor of Creole were largely untapped possibilities for writing and performing poetry, even though this commitment to Jamaican English prevented her from being recognized as a poet until after the Black cultural revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s. In her poetry she often assumes the perspective of a West Indian trickster, such as the woman who cunningly subverts gender and geographic hierarchies in "Jamaica Oman [Woman]." Bennett makes wily and ebullient use of received forms, employing the ironic possibilities of dramatic monologue, the contrasts and inversions afforded by the ballad stanza, and the time-tested wisdom and pith of Jamaican proverbs. Both on the page and in her recorded performances, Bennett's vital characters and robust imagination help win over readers unfamiliar with Jamaican English, who can join in the laughing seriousness of poems such as "Colonization in Reverse," which ironically inverts Britain's xenophobic apprehension at the postwar influx of Jamaican

immigrants, while also casting a suspicious eye on some Jamaicans' reverse exploitation of their exploiters. No one is safe from the multiple ironies and carnivalesque irreverence of Bennett's verse.

Jamaica Language¹

Listen, na!

My Auntie Roachy seh dat it bwile² her temper an really bex³ her fi true anytime she hear anybody a style we Jamaican dialect as "corruption of the English language." For if dat be de case, den dem shoulda call English Language corruption of Norman French an Latin an all dem tarra⁴ language what dem seh dat English is derived from.

Oonoo⁵ hear de wud? "Derived." English is a derivation but Jamaica Dialect is corruption! What a unfairity!

Auntie Roachy seh dat if Jamaican Dialect is corruption of de English Language, den it is also a corruption of de African Twi Language to, a oh!

For Jamaican Dialect did start when we English forefahders did start musan-boun⁶ we African ancestors fi stop talk fi-dem African Language altogedder an learn fi talk so-so⁷ English, because we English forefahders couldn understan what we African ancestors-dem wasa seh to dem one anodder when dem wasa talk eena dem African Language to dem one annodder!

But we African ancestors-dem pop⁸ we English forefahders-dem. Yes! Pop dem an disguise up de English Language fi projec fi-dem African Language in such a way dat we English forefahders-dem still couldn understan what we African ancestors-dem wasa talk bout when dem wasa talk to dem one annodder!

Yes, bwoy!

So till now, aldoah plenty a we Jamaica Dialect wuds-dem come from English wuds, yet, still an for all, de talkin is so-so Jamaican, an when we ready we can meck it soun like it no got no English at all eena it! An no so-so English-talkin smaddy cyaan⁹ understan weh we a seh if we doan want dem to understan weh we a seh, a oh!

An we fix up we dialect wud fi soun like whatsoever we a talk bout, look like! For instance, when we seh sinting “kooroo-kooroo”¹ up, yuh know seh dat it mark-up mark-up. An if we seh one house “rookoo-rookoo”² up, it is plain to see dat it ole an shaky-shaky. An when we seh smaddy “boogoo-yagga,” everybody know seh dat him outa-order; an if we seh dem “boonoonoonoos,”³ yuh know seh dat dem nice an we like dem. Mmmm.

Aunty Roachy seh dat Jamaica Dialect is more direc an to de point dan English. For all like how English smaddy would seh “Go away,” Jamaican jus seh “Gweh!” An de only time we use more wuds dan English is when we want fi meck someting soun strong: like when dem seh sinting “batter-batter” up, it soun more expressive dan if yuh seh “it is battered.” But most of all we fling weh all de bangarang an trimmins⁴-dem an only lef what wantin, an dat’s why when English smaddy seh “I got stuck by a prick” Jamaican jus seh “Macca⁵ jook me”!

So fi-we Jamaica Language is not no English Language corruption at all, a oh! An we no haffi shame a it, like one gal who did go a Englan go represent we Jamaican folk-song “One shif me got” as “De sole underwear garment I possess,” and go sing “Mumma, Mumma, dem ketch Puppa” as “Mother, Mother, they apprehended Father”!

Ay ya yie!

1979–81/1993

Endnotes

- Note 1: Originally broadcast sometime between 1979 and 1981, this radio monologue has been reprinted from *Aunty Roachy Seh* (1993), ed. Mervyn Morris.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Boils.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Vexes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Other.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: You (plural).[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Compel. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Only. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Outwitted. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Can't. "Smaddy": people. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Rough; rocky. "Sinting": something. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Unsteady. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Beautiful; wonderful (term of endearment). "Boogoo-yagga": ill-mannered. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Miscellaneous trash and trimmings. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A prickly plant. [Return to reference 5](#)

Dry-Foot Bwoy¹

Wha wrong wid Mary dry-foot bwoy?
Dem gal got him fi mock,^o
An when me meet him tarra night
De bwoy gi me a shock!

5 Me tell him seh him auntie an
Him cousin dem sen howdy²
An ask him how him getting awn.
Him seh, 'Oh, jolley, jolley!'

10 Me start fi feel so sorry fi
De po bad-lucky soul,
Me tink him come a foreign lan
Come ketch bad foreign cole!

15 Me tink him got a bad sore-troat,
But as him chat-chat gwan
Me fine out seh is foreign twang
De bwoy wasa put awn!³

20 For me notice dat him answer
To nearly all me seh
Was 'Actually', 'What', 'Oh deah!'
An all dem sinting deh.^o

Me gi a joke, de gal dem laugh;
But hear de bwoy, 'Haw-haw!
I'm sure you got that bally-dash^o
Out of the cinema!'

Same time me laas me temper, an

25 Me holler, 'Bwoy, kirout!^o
 No chat to me wid no hot pittata
 Eena yuh mout!'

30 Him tan^o up like him stunted, den
 Hear him no, 'How silley!
 I don't think that I really
 Understand you, actually.'

35 Me seh, 'Yuh understan me, yaw!
 No yuh name Cudjoe Scoop?
 Always visit Nana kitchen an
 Gi laugh fi gungoo soup!⁴

40 'An now all yuh can seh is "actually"?
 Bwoy, but tap!
 Wha happen to dem sweet Jamaica
 Joke yuh use fi pop?'

45 Him get bex^o and walk tru de door,
 Him head eena de air;
 De gal-dem bawl out affa him,⁵
 'Not going? What! Oh deah!'

An from dat night till tedeh, mah,
 Dem all got him fi mock.
 Miss Mary dry-foot bwoy!
 Cyaan get over de shock!

1957

Endnotes

- Note 1: Thin-legged (inexperienced) boy. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: I told him that his auntie and his cousins sent [or send] greetings. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: But as he kept talking I realized his foreign accent was put on.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Chastising the boy for his pretensions, the speaker reminds him that he is African Jamaican. Cudjoe and Nana are African names used in Jamaica. "Gungoo": congo pea.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The girls went crying after him.[Return to reference 5](#)

Notes

- °: *The girls are mocking him*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *All of them things there*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *nonsense, balderdash*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *clear out*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *stand*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *vexed*[Return to reference °](#)

Colonization in Reverse

What a joyful news, Miss Mattie;
Ah feel like me heart gwine burs—
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in reverse.!

5 By de hundred, by de tousan,
From country an from town,
By de ship-load, by de plane-load,
Jamaica is Englan boun.

10 Dem a pour out a Jamaica;
Everybody future plan
Is fi get a big-time job
An settle in de motherlan.

15 What a islan! What a people!
Man an woman, ole an young
Jussa pack dem bag an baggage
An tun history upside dung!°

20 Some people doan like travel,
But fi show dem loyalty
Dem all a open up cheap-fare-
To-Englan agency;

An week by week dem shippin off
Dem countryman like fire
Fi immigrate an populate
De seat a de Empire.

25 Oonoo° se how life is funny,
Oonoo see de tunabout?

Jamaica live fi box bread
Out a English people mout.

30 For when dem catch a Englan
An start play dem different role
Some will settle down to work
An some will settle fi de dole.°

35 Jane seh de dole is not too bad
Because dey payin she
Two pounds a week fi seek a job
Dat suit her dignity.

40 Me seh Jane will never fine work
At de rate how she dah look
For all day she stay pon Aunt Fan couch
An read love-story book.

What a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse;
But ah wonderin how dem gwine stan
Colonizin in reverse.

1957

Endnotes

- Note I: Encouraged by the postwar labor shortage in England and the scarcity of work at home, three hundred thousand West Indians migrated to Britain from 1948 to 1962. [Return to reference I](#)

Notes

- °: *down* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *you (plural)* [Return to reference °](#)

- °: *for unemployment benefits* [Return to reference °](#)

Jamaica Oman¹

Jamaica oman cunny, sah!^o
Is how dem jinnal so?^o
Look how long dem liberated
An de man dem never know!

5 Look how long Jamaica oman
—Modder, sister, wife, sweetheart—
Outa road an eena yard^o deh pon
A dominate her part!

10 From Maroon Nanny² teck her body
Bounce bullet back pon man,
To when nowadays gal-pickney^o tun
Spellin-Bee champion.

15 From de grass root to de hill-top,
In profession, skill an trade,
Jamaica oman teck her time
Dah mount an meck de grade.

20 Some backa man a push, some side-a
Man a hole him han,
Some a lick sense eena man head,
Some a guide him pon him plan!

Neck an neck an foot an foot wid man
She buckle hole^o her own;
While man a call her 'so-so rib'
Oman a tun backbone!³

An long before Oman Lib⁴ bruck out

25 Over foreign lan
Jamaica female wasa work
Her liberated plan!

30 Jamaica oman know she strong,
She know she tallawah,^o
But she no want her pickney^o dem
Fi start call her 'Puppa'.^o

35 So de cunny Jamma^o oman
Gwan like pants-suit is a style,
An Jamaica man no know she wear
De trousiz all de while!

40 So Jamaica oman coixin
Fambly budget from explode
A so Jamaica man a sing
'Oman a heaby load!'⁵

But de cunny Jamma oman
Ban her belly,⁶ bite her tongue,
Ketch water, put pot pon fire
An jus dig her toe a grung.⁷

45 For 'Oman luck deh a dungle',⁸
Some rooted more dan some,
But as long as fowl a scratch dungle heap
Oman luck mus come!

50 Lickle by lickle man start praise her,
Day by day de praise a grow;
So him praise her, so it sweet her,
For she wonder if him know.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Woman.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Jamaican national hero who led the Maroons, fugitive slaves, in battle during the 18th century. Bullets reputedly ricocheted off her and killed her enemies.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Eve is said to have come from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:21–22).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Women's liberation movement.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A folk song often sung while working in the fields.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Binds her belly (a practice associated with grief; also a suggestion of belt tightening, as in hunger).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: And just digs her toes into the ground.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, woman's luck will be rediscovered (proverbial). "Dungle": garbage dump.[Return to reference 8](#)

Notes

- °: *cunning, sir*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *how are they so tricky?*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *home*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *girl-child*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *she take hold*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *sturdy*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *children*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Papa*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Jamaican*[Return to reference °](#)

KAMAU BRATHWAITE

As a poet and historian, Kamau Brathwaite (1930–2020) was the most prominent West Indian spokesman for “the literature of reconnection”: he sought to recover and revalue the African inheritance in the Caribbean—a religious, linguistic, and cultural legacy seen as embarrassing or taboo through most of the twentieth century. In *History of the Voice*, a lecture first delivered in 1979, Brathwaite argues that African Caribbeans, their ancestors uprooted by slavery, were further cut off from their specific history and their local environment by Standard English models of language and literature. He proposes “nation language,” a creolized English saturated with African words, rhythms, even grammar, as a crucial tool for writers to recuperate African Caribbean history and experience. His own poetry draws on West Indian syncopations, orality, and musical traditions, but also adapts imported models, such as the modernist dislocations of persona, rhythm, and tone in T. S. Eliot’s verse.

He was born Lawson Edward Brathwaite in Bridgetown, Barbados, at the eastern edge of the West Indies. His undergraduate studies in history were at Cambridge University; his graduate studies, at the University of Sussex. He worked as an education officer for the Ministry of Education in Ghana (1955–62) and taught history at the University of the West Indies, before taking a position in comparative literature at New York University in 1991. His many books of poetry include a work of epic scope and scale, *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973), which gathers *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969). Toward the end of his career, his poetry became more engaged with the idea of writing as a recording technology in books such as *X/Self* (1987) and *ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey* (1999) (see [p. 1094](#) in this volume).

[Nation Language]¹

What I am going to talk about this morning is language from the Caribbean, the process of using English in a different way from the “norm”. English in a new sense as I prefer to call it. English in an ancient sense. English in a very traditional sense. And sometimes not English at all, but *language*.

I start my thoughts, taking up from the discussion that developed after Dennis Brutus’s² very excellent presentation. Without logic, and through instinct, the people who spoke with Dennis from the floor yesterday brought up the question of language. * * * In his case, it was English, and English as spoken by Africans, and the native languages as spoken by Africans.

We in the Caribbean have a similar kind of plurality: we have English, which is the imposed language on much of the archipelago. English is an imperial language, as are French, Dutch, and Spanish. We have what we call creole English, which is a mixture of English and an adaptation that English took in the new environment of the Caribbean when it became mixed with the other imported languages. We have also what is called *nation language*, which is the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors. Finally, we have the remnants of ancestral languages still persisting in the Caribbean. There is Amerindian, which is active in certain parts of Central America but not in the Caribbean because the Amerindians are a destroyed people, and their languages were practically destroyed. We have Hindi, spoken by some of the more traditional East Indians who live in the Caribbean, and there are also varieties of Chinese. And, miraculously, there are survivals of African languages still persisting in the Caribbean. So we have that spectrum—that prism—of languages similar to the kind of structure that

Dennis described for South Africa. Now, I have to give you some kind of background to the development of these languages, the historical development of this plurality, because I can't take it for granted that you know and understand the history of the Caribbean.

The Caribbean is a set of islands stretching out from Florida in a mighty curve. You must know of the Caribbean at least from television, at least now with hurricane David³ coming right into it. The islands stretch out on an arc of some two thousand miles from Florida through the Atlantic to the South American coast, and they were originally inhabited by Amerindian people, Taino, Siboney, Carib, Arawak. In 1492, Columbus "discovered" (as it is said) the Caribbean, and with that discovery came the intrusion of European culture and peoples and a fragmentation of the original Amerindian culture. We had Europe "nationalizing" itself into Spanish, French, English and Dutch so that people had to start speaking (and *thinking*) in four metropolitan languages rather than possibly a single native language. Then, with the destruction of the Amerindians, which took place within 30 years of Columbus' discovery (one million dead a year), it was necessary for the Europeans to import new labour bodies into the Caribbean. And the most convenient form of labour was the labour on the very edge of the trade winds—the labour on the edge of the *slave* trade winds, the labour on the edge of the hurricane, the labour on the edge of West Africa—. And so the peoples of Ashanti,⁴ Congo, Nigeria, from all that mighty coast of western Africa were imported into the Caribbean. And we had the arrival in that area of a new language structure. It consisted of many languages, but basically they had a common semantic and stylistic form. What these languages had to do, however, was to submerge themselves, because officially the conquering peoples—the Spaniards, the English, the French, and the Dutch—did not wish to hear people speaking Ashanti or any of the Congolese languages. So there was a submergence of this imported language. Its status became one of inferiority. Similarly, its speakers were slaves. They were conceived of as inferiors—nonhuman, in fact—. But this very submergence served an interesting intercultural purpose, because

although people continued to speak English as it was spoken in Elizabethan times and on through the Romantic and Victorian ages, that English was, nonetheless, still being influenced by the underground language, the submerged language that the slaves had brought. And that underground language was itself constantly transforming itself into new forms. It was moving from a purely African form to a form that was African, but which was adapting to the new environment and to the cultural imperatives of the European languages. And it was influencing the way in which the French, Dutch, and Spanish spoke their own languages. So there was a very complex process taking place which is now beginning to surface in our literature.

In the Caribbean, as in South Africa (and in any area of cultural imperialism for that matter), the educational system did not recognize the presence of these various languages. What our educational system did was to recognize and maintain the language of the conquistador—the language of the planter, the language of the official, the language of the Anglican preacher—. It insisted that not only would English be spoken in the anglophone Caribbean, but that the educational system would carry the contours of an English heritage. Hence, as Dennis said, Shakespeare, George Eliot, Jane Austen—British literature and literary forms, the models that were intimate to Great Britain, that had very little to do, really, with the environment and the reality of the Caribbean—were dominant in the Caribbean educational system. People were forced to learn things that had no relevance to themselves. Paradoxically, in the Caribbean (as in many other “cultural disaster” areas), the people educated in this system came to know more, even today, about English kings and queens than they do about our own national heroes, our own slave rebels—the people who helped to build and to destroy our society—. We are more excited by English literary models, by the concept of, say, Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood, than we are by Nanny of the Maroons,⁵ a name some of us didn’t even know until a few years ago. And in terms of what we write, our perceptual models, we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling

of snow for instance—the models are all there for the falling of the snow—than of the force of the hurricanes that take place every year. In other words, we haven't got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience; whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall. It is that kind of situation that we are in.

Now the creole adaptation to all this is the child who, instead of writing in an essay "The snow was falling on the fields of Shropshire"⁶ (which is what our children literally were writing until a few years ago, below drawings they made of white snow fields and the corn-haired people who inhabited such a landscape), wrote "The snow was falling on the cane fields." The child had not yet reached the obvious statement that it wasn't snow at all, but rain that was probably falling on the cane fields. She was trying to have both cultures at the same time. But that is creolization.

What is even more important, as we develop this business of emergent language in the Caribbean, is the actual rhythm and the syllables, the very body work, in a way, of the language. What English has given us as a model for poetry, and to a lesser extent, prose (but poetry is the basic tool here), is the pentameter: "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day."⁷ There have, of course, been attempts to break it. And there were other dominant forms like, for example, *Beowulf* (c. 750), *The Seafarer*,⁸ and what Langland (1322?–1400) had produced:

*For trewthe telleth that love. is triacle of hevene;
May no synne be on him sene. that useth that spise,
And alle his werkes he wrougte. with love as him liste.*

Or, from *Piers the Plowman* (which does not make it into *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*,⁹ but which we all had to "do" at school) the haunting prologue:

*In a somer seson. whan soft was the sonne
I shope me into shroudes. as I a shepe were*

Which has recently inspired our own Derek Walcott to his first major nation language effort:

*In idle August, while the sea soft,
and leaves of brown islands stick to the rim
of this Caribbean, I blow out the light
by the dreamless face of Maria Concepcion
to ship as a seaman on the schooner Flight.*¹

But by the time we reach Chaucer (1345–1400), the pentameter prevails. Over in the New World, the Americans—Walt Whitman—tried to bridge or to break the pentameter through a cosmic movement, a large movement of sound. Cummings tried to fragment it. And Marianne Moore attacked it with syllabics.² But basically the pentameter remained, and it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameter. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm that approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience. We have been trying to break out of the entire pentametric model in the Caribbean and to move into a system that more closely and intimately approaches our own experience. So that is what we are talking about now.

It is nation language in the Caribbean that, in fact, largely ignores the pentameter. Nation language is the language that is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of its lexicon, but it is not English in terms of its syntax. And English it certainly is not in terms of its rhythm and timbre, its own sound explosion. In its contours, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, would be English to a greater or lesser degree. And this brings us back to the question that some of you raised yesterday: can English be a revolutionary language? And the lovely answer that came back was: it is not English that is the agent. It is not language, but people, who make revolutions.

I think, however, that language does really have a role to play here, certainly in the Caribbean. But it is an English that is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people. It is what I call, as I say, *nation language*. I use the term in contrast to *dialect*. The word dialect has been bandied about for a long time, and it carries very pejorative overtones. Dialect is thought of as “bad” English. Dialect is “inferior” English. Dialect is the language when you want to make fun of someone. Caricature speaks in dialect. Dialect has a long history coming from the plantation where people’s dignity was distorted through their languages and the descriptions that the dialect gave to them. Nation language, on the other hand, is the submerged area of that dialect that is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English, but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout, or a machine-gun, or the wind, or a wave. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time.

* * *

The mainstream poets who were moving from standard English to nation language were influenced basically, I think (again the models are important), by T. S. Eliot. What T. S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone.³ That is what really attracted us to Eliot. And you can see how the Caribbean poets introduced here have been influenced by him, although they eventually went on to create their own environmental expression.

* * *

1979–81 1984, 1986

Endnotes

- Note 1: First printed separately in 1984, Brathwaite's lecture *History of the Voice* was slightly modified and incorporated in his essay collection *Roots* (1986, 1993), from which this selection is excerpted.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: South African poet (1924–2009).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A hurricane that killed over 2,000 people in the Caribbean in August 1979.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Region in present-day central Ghana.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The Maroons were Africans and escaped slaves who, after running away or participating in successful rebellions, set up autonomous societies throughout plantation America in marginal and certainly inaccessible areas outside European influence. . . . Nanny of the Maroons, an ex-Ashanti (?) Queen Mother, is regarded as one of the greatest of the Jamaican freedom fighters [*Brathwaite's note*].[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Region of western England on the Welsh border, written about by the English poet A. E. Housman (1859–1936).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The opening line of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," by the English poet Thomas Gray (1716–1771).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Poem in Old English.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Collection of songs and lyric poems published in London. *Piers the Plowman*: Middle English poem believed to have been written by William Langland (ca. 1330–1387).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Beginning of "The Schooner *Flight*," by the Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott (1930–2017).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Verses based on the number of syllables, not accents, in a line. E. E. Cummings (1894–1962), American poet. Marianne Moore (1887–1972), American poet.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3:

For those of us who really made the breakthrough, it was Eliot's actual voice—or rather his recorded voice, property of the British Council (Barbados)—reading "Preludes," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *The Waste Land*, and later the *Four Quartets*—not the texts—which turned us on. In that dry deadpan delivery, the "riddims" of St. Louis (though we did not know the source then) were stark and clear for those of us who at the same time were listening to the dislocations of Bird, Dizzy, and Klook. And it is interesting that, on the whole, the establishment could not stand Eliot's voice—and far less jazz [*Brathwaite's note*]. "Bird": American jazz musician Charlie "Bird" Parker (1920–1955). "Dizzy": American jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie (1917–1993). "Klook": American jazz drummer Kenny Clarke (1914–1985).

[Return to reference 3](#)

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (b. 1938) was born in Limuru, Kenya, where his father was a peasant farmer. He was educated at the Alliance High School in Kikuyu, Kenya; Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda; and Leeds University in England. In the late 1960s, while teaching at University College, Nairobi, Kenya, he was one of the prime movers behind the abolition of the college's English department, arguing for its replacement by a Department of African Literature and Languages (two departments were formed, one of literature, the other of language). His novels include *Weep Not, Child* (1964), about the 1950s Mau Mau rebellion against British rule in Kenya, *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), about the war's aftermath, and *Petals of Blood* (1977), about the failure of the East African state, and he has written plays and novels in his native Gĩkũyũ, also sharply critical of post-independence Kenya, such as the novel *Matigari* (1986). In 1982, after his imprisonment in Kenya and the banning of his books there, Ngũgĩ left to teach abroad, most recently at the University of California, Irvine.

At the beginning of *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ declares the book "my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili all the way." Although Ngũgĩ has subsequently modified this position, he lays out starkly the case against English language and literature as tools of colonialism, which continue to have insidious effects long after formal decolonization. As the student of a British colonial education, Ngũgĩ came to feel that, because of the close relation between language and cultural memory, the imposition of English language and literature severs colonized peoples from their cultural experience—an experience best recovered and explored in indigenous languages.

From Decolonising the Mind

From *The Language of African Literature*

III

I was born into a large peasant family: father, four wives and about twenty-eight children. I also belonged, as we all did in those days, to a wider extended family and to the community as a whole.

We spoke Gĩkũyũ¹ as we worked in the fields. We spoke Gĩkũyũ in and outside the home. I can vividly recall those evenings of story-telling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. We children would re-tell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields picking the pyrethrum flowers,² tea-leaves or coffee beans of our European and African landlords.

The stories, with mostly animals as the main characters, were all told in Gĩkũyũ. Hare, being small, weak but full of innovative wit and cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard, hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong. We followed the animals in their struggle against hostile nature—drought, rain, sun, wind—a confrontation often forcing them to search for forms of co-operation. But we were also interested in their struggles amongst themselves, and particularly between the beasts and the victims of prey. These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world.

Not that we neglected stories with human beings as the main characters. There were two types of characters in such human-centred narratives: the species of truly human beings with qualities of courage, kindness, mercy, hatred of evil, concern for others; and a man-eat-man two-mouthed species with qualities of greed, selfishness, individualism and hatred of what was good for the larger co-operative community. Co-operation as the ultimate good in a community was a constant theme. It could unite human beings with animals against ogres and beasts of prey, as in the story of how dove, after being fed with castor-oil seeds, was sent to fetch a smith

working far away from home and whose pregnant wife was being threatened by these man-eating two-mouthed ogres.

There were good and bad story-tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it would always be fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones.

We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own. The home and the field were then our pre-primary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one.

And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. I first went to Kamaandura, missionary run, and then to another called Maanguuũ run by nationalists grouped around the Gĩkũyũ Independent and Karinga Schools Association. Our language of education was still Gĩkũyũ. The very first time I was ever given an ovation for my writing was over a composition in Gĩkũyũ. So for my first four years there was still harmony between the language of my formal education and that of the Limuru peasant community.

It was after the declaration of a state of emergency over Kenya in 1952³ that all the schools run by patriotic nationalists were taken over by the colonial regime and were placed under District Education Boards chaired by Englishmen. English became the language of my

formal education. In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.

Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyũ in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment—three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks—or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID OR I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community.

The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning. English became *the* main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education.

As you may know, the colonial system of education in addition to its apartheid racial demarcation had the structure of a pyramid: a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary middle, and an even narrower university apex. Selections from primary into secondary were through an examination, in my time called Kenya African Preliminary Examination, in which one had to pass six subjects ranging from Maths to Nature Study and Kiswahili.⁴ All the papers were written in English. Nobody could pass the exam who failed the English language paper no matter how brilliantly he had done in the other subjects. I remember one boy in my class of 1954 who had distinctions in all subjects except English, which he had failed. He was made to fail the entire exam. He went on to become a turn boy⁵ in a bus company. I who had only passes but a credit in English got

a place at the Alliance High School, one of the most elitist institutions for Africans in colonial Kenya. The requirements for a place at the University, Makerere University College,⁶ were broadly the same: nobody could go on to wear the undergraduate red gown, no matter how brilliantly they had performed in all the other subjects unless they had a credit—not even a simple pass!—in English. Thus the most coveted place in the pyramid and in the system was only available to the holder of an English language credit card. English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom.

Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. Orature (oral literature) in Kenyan languages stopped. In primary school I now read simplified Dickens and Stevenson alongside Rider Haggard. Jim Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown—not Hare, Leopard and Lion—were now my daily companions in the world of imagination.⁷ In secondary school, Scott and G. B. Shaw vied with more Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Alan Paton, Captain W. E. Johns.⁸ At Makerere I read English: from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot with a touch of Graham Greene.⁹

Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.

* * *

Endnotes

- Note 1: Bantu language spoken in western Kenya by approximately five million people.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Flower used to produce a natural insecticide.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Mau Mau, militant African nationalists, led a revolt in 1952 that resulted in four years of British military operations and the deaths of more than 11,000 insurgents.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Swahili, a Bantu language that is the most widely understood language in Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, the person who operates a turnstile.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: University in Kampala, Uganda, that was connected with the University of London in the 1950s and 1960s.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:
The English novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870) wrote *Oliver Twist*. Jim Hawkins is the hero of *Treasure Island*, by the Scottish fiction writer and essayist Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894). The English novelist Rider Haggard (1856–1925) wrote African adventure stories. *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is by the English novelist Thomas Hughes (1822–1896).
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), Scottish novelist. George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), Anglo-Irish dramatist. John Buchan (1875–1940), Scottish author of adventure stories. Alan Paton (1903–1988), South African novelist. William Earl Johns (1893–1968), English author of children's fiction.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1343–1400), English poet. T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), Anglo-American poet. Graham Greene (1904–1991), English novelist. "Read": here "majored in."[Return to reference 9](#)

IV

* * *

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

V

So what was the colonialist imposition of a foreign language doing to us children?

The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.

For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.

* * *

IX

I started writing in Gĩkũyũ language in 1977 after seventeen years of involvement in Afro-European literature, in my case Afro-English literature. * * * Wherever I have gone, particularly in Europe, I have been confronted with the question: why are you now writing in Gĩkũyũ? Why do you now write in an African language? In some academic quarters I have been confronted with the rebuke, 'Why have you abandoned us?' It was almost as if, in choosing to write in Gĩkũyũ, I was doing something abnormal. But Gĩkũyũ is my mother tongue! The very fact that what common sense dictates in the literary practice of other cultures is being questioned in an African writer is a measure of how far imperialism has distorted the view of African realities. It has turned reality upside down: the abnormal is viewed as normal and the normal is viewed as abnormal. Africa actually enriches Europe: but Africa is made to believe that it needs Europe to rescue it from poverty. Africa's natural and human resources continue to develop Europe and America: but Africa is made to feel grateful for aid from the same quarters that still sit on the back of the continent. Africa even produces intellectuals who now rationalise this upside-down way of looking at Africa.

I believe that my writing in Gĩkũyũ language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples. In schools and universities our Kenyan languages—that is the languages of the many nationalities which make up Kenya—were associated with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment. We who went through that school system were meant to graduate with a hatred of the people and the culture and the values of the language of our daily humiliation and punishment. I do not want to see Kenyan children growing up in that imperialist-imposed tradition of contempt for the tools of communication developed by their communities and their history. I want them to transcend colonial alienation.

* * *

We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy¹ did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours.

1986

Endnotes

- Note 1: Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Russian novelist; Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837), Russian poet. [Return to reference 1](#)

SAMUEL SELVON

Samuel “Sam” Selvon (1923–1994) was born in San Fernando, Trinidad. His father was a cocoa merchant from India, and his mother was of mixed Indian and Scottish ancestry. Selvon attended Naparima College (a secondary school for boys) before joining the Trinidad Royal Navy reserve in 1939. He worked as a wireless radio operator for a brief period and then shifted to journalism and literary writing in Trinidad. He and his wife moved to London in 1950 as part of the Windrush Generation, a large wave of immigrants from the Caribbean colonies who sought job opportunities in the United Kingdom. This generation contributed to the growing racial diversity of post–World War II England and signaled demographic shifts in the population of the UK as former subjects of the British Empire settled in its metropolitan center.

As an East Indian growing up in the West Indies, Selvon was no stranger to resettlement, and he brought themes and styles of cultural mixture to his novels and short stories. *A Brighter Sun* (1952), published just after his arrival in England, explored the mutual distrust among Indians and Creoles (a group of mixed African and European ancestry) in Trinidad. Subsequent novels and short story collections explored the transition from the racial politics of the Caribbean islands to the de facto racial segregation of London, where newly arrived immigrants of color found themselves systemically isolated and marginalized by the predominantly White population. Selvon’s most renowned novel, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), combined modernist techniques of narrative fragmentation with dialect writing to capture the collective disorientation and alienation of Black and Brown immigrants, mostly single men, in their own voices and accents. Its sequels, *Moses Ascending* (1975) and *Moses Migrating* (1983), followed one migrant in particular through the dream of owning a home and his return to his native Trinidad.

The short story included here, "Waiting for Aunty to Cough" from the collection *Ways of Sunlight* (1957), is representative of Selvon's subtle humor and sensitivity to the male immigrant experience. The story is told by a first-person narrator, a migrant waiting for his friend Brackley to return from a date with a White local woman who lives on the outskirts of London. Throughout the "ballad," as the narrator calls it, Selvon adopts the informal language and slang of his subjects so that dialect both estranges Standardized English and invites the reader into the thoughts and feelings of protagonists otherwise stigmatized within London. Brackley's story, framed by the narrator, highlights the vulnerability and fear of Black migrants in London as well as the self-protective role that storytelling plays among young men struggling to establish themselves in a new place.

Waiting for Aunty to Cough

It had a late lime¹ what few of the boys acquainted with. That don't mean to say was anything exclusive, but as far as I know Brackley was the only fellar who get in with a thing² that living far from London, and had was to see the piece home every night, going out of the city and coming back late, missing bus and train and having to hustle or else stay stranded in one of them places behind God back.

I mean, some people might say a place like where Brackley used to go ain't far, and argue even that it still included in London, but to the city boys, as soon as you start to hit Clapham Common or Chiswick or Mile End or Highgate,³ that mean you living in the country, and they out to give you tone, like: 'Mind you miss the last bus home, old man,' and, 'When next you coming to town?' or, 'You could get some fresh eggs for me where you living?'

Well Brackley in fact settle down nicely in Central, a two and ten room in Ladbroke Grove,⁴ with easy communications⁵ for liming out in the evenings after work, and the old Portobello road⁶ near by to buy rations like saltfish and red beans and pig foot and pig tail. And almost every evening he would meet the boys and they would lime by the Arch, or the Gate,⁷ and have a cup of coffee (it have place like stupidity now all over London selling coffee, you notice?) and coast a talk and keep a weather eye open for whatever might appear on the horizon.

But a time come, when the boys begin to miss Brackley.

'Anybody see Brackley?'

'I ain't see Brackley a long time, man. He must be move.'

'He uses to be in this coffee shop regular, but these days I can't see him at all.'

All this time, Brackley on one of them green trains you does catch in Charing Cross or Waterloo,⁸ taking a ride and seeing the girl

home.

Though Brackley living in London for eight years, is as if he start to discover a new world. Brackley never hear name like what he reading as they pass them stations—Gypsy Hill, Penge West, Forest Hill.

'You sure we on the right train?' Brackley frighten like hell the first time, feeling as if they going to Scotland or something. 'How far from London you say this place is?'

'It is in London, I keep telling you,' the girl say patiently.

'All of this is London?' Brackley look out and see a station name Honor Oak Park. Houses fading away and down there real grim as if is a place far out in the country.

'Yes,' Beatrice say.

'And every day, you have to come all this way to work in London?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, you must be one of those commuter people I read about in the papers.'

Brackley look at his wristwatch. 'I don't like this lime,' he say.

'Oh, you'll get accustomed to it,' Beatrice say. 'It is like nothing to me now.'

'I wonder what the boys doing in the coffee shop in town,' Brackley mutter.

'That is all you ever worry about—wasting your time,' Beatrice start to sulk.

'It ain't have no high spots this side of the world?' Brackley ask. 'If it have, we could go out down here instead of staying in London and coming home late every night.'

'You know I like to go out in the city,' Beatrice pout. 'The only place we could go to down here is near to Croydon.'⁹

'Croydon!' Brackley repeat. 'Where the aeroplanes come from all over the world? You mean to say we so far from London?'

'There are frequent trains,' Beatrice say anxiously.

'Frequent trains!' Brackley repeat. 'Frequent planes, you mean! I don't like the lime at all.'

But all the same, Brackley like the thing and he was seeing she home every night.

Well he start to extend his geographical knowledge from the time he going out with Beatrice, and when he was explaining his absence from the city to the boys, he making it sound as if is a grand lime.

'Man,' he boasting, 'you-all don't know London! You think London is the Gate and the Arch and Trafalgar Square,¹ but them places is nothing. You ever hear about Honor Oak Rise?'

'Which part that is, behind God back?'

'That is a place in London, man! I mean, look at it this way. You live in London so long, and up to now you don't know where that is. You see what I mean?'

'Man Brackley, you only full of guile. This time so that woman have you stupid and travelling all over the country, when you could be liming here. You staying tonight? It have two sharp things does come for coffee here—I think they from Sweden, and you know over there ain't have no inhibition.'²

'I can't stay tonight.'

'Today is Saturday, no night bus.'

But Brackley in hot with Beatrice at this stage and that ain't worrying him. What happen that night was he find himself walking to Kent³ afterwards, thinking that he was on the way to London, and he would have found himself picking hops⁴ or something if a fellar didn't put him right.

One night Brackley was taking a cuppa and a roll in a little place it have near Charing Cross, what does stay open all night for stragglers like him. The set-up is this: three-four frowsy women, and some tests who look as if they only come out at night. I mean, if you really want to meet some characters, is to lime out there by the Embankment after midnight, and you sure to meet some individuals.

That night, two fellars playing dominoes. A group stand up round a fire that they light with wood to keep warm. Suddenly a big

commotion start, because the police take Olive and a test say it serve her right.

A woman start to 'buse the fellar who say it serve Olive right.

'What do you know about it?' the woman snarl. 'Keep your ——ing mouth shut.'

She start to scratch her thigh. Same time another woman come hustling up with the stale news that the police take Olive.

'Yes,' the first woman say, 'and this bastard here say that it served her right.' She turn to the fellar again, 'Keep your ——ing mouth shut,' she say, though the fellar ain't saying anything.

Suddenly she turn on Brackley and start to 'buse him, saying that he was responsible. Poor Brackley ain't have a clue what the woman talking about, but three-four frowsy-looking sports gather around him and want to beat him up.

Brackley ease away and start to go up by Whitehall, and the starlings kicking up hell on the sides of the tall buildings, and is almost three o'clock in the morning and he thinking what a hell of a thing life is, how he never ever hear about any Olive and look how them women wanted to beat him up.

Well to get back to the heart of the ballad, one rainy night Brackley and Beatrice went theatre, and theatre over late, and they catch the last train out of town. While they on the train—and Brackley like a regular commuter these days, reading the *Standard*⁵ while Beatrice catching up on some knitting—Beatrice suddenly open her handbag and say: 'Gosh, I think I've lost my key!'

'You could always get another one,' Brackley say, reading *How The Other Half Laughs*.

'You don't understand,' Beatrice moan. 'Aunty is always complaining about my coming in late, and by the time we get home it will be long after midnight, and the door will be shut.'

'Ring the bell,' Brackley say, laughing at a joke in the paper.

'I daren't wake Aunty at that hour,' Beatrice say, putting aside the knitting to worry better.

'Don't worry, I will open a window for you,' Brackley say.

But when they get to where Beatrice living she was still worrying what to do. She tell Brackley to wait by the gate. She went inside and pick up a tiny pebble and throw at the window, which was on the first floor. It make a sound ping! but nothing happen. After a little while she throw another one ping! but still nothing happen.

Brackley stand up there watching her.

She turn to Brackley helplessly. 'I can't wake Aunty,' she say.

Brackley open the gate and come inside and pick up a big brick from the garden to pelt at the people glass window. Beatrice barely had time to hold his hand.

'Are you mad?' she say in a fierce whisper.

'Well,' Brackley say, 'you don't want to get inside?'

'You are making too much noise already,' Beatrice whisper. 'I will have to stay on the steps until Aunty gets up.'

'What time is that?' Brackley ask.

'About six o'clock,' Beatrice say. 'She is an early riser.'

'You mean to say,' Brackley say, 'you spending the night here in the damp? Why you don't make a big noise and wake she up?'

'No no,' Beatrice say quickly, 'we mustn't make any noise. The neighbours are very troublesome. Let us wait here until Aunty gets up. She is restless at night. When I hear her coughing I will throw another stone.'

So Brackley and Beatrice sit down on the wet steps, waiting for Aunty to cough.

One o'clock come and gone, two o'clock come and gone. Three o'clock rain start to pelt slantways and fall on the steps wetting Brackley. This time so, as Brackley look around, the world grim. Rain and fog around him, and Beatrice sleeping on his shoulder.

He shake her.

Beatrice open her eyes and say, 'What is it, did you hear Aunty cough?'

'No. It look as if her cold get better, I don't think she going to cough tonight at all.'

'She always coughs in the night. As soon as she does I will throw some stones again.'

'Why you don't make a big noise and finish with it? Back home in Trinidad,⁶ you think this could happen? Why—'

'Hush, you are speaking too loudly. I told you it would cause trouble with the neighbours.'

'Why you don't wake up the people on the ground floor?'

'Nobody is there—they work nights.'

'I ain't even have a cigarette,' Brackley grumble, wondering what the boys doing, if they get in with the two girls from Sweden and gone to sleep in a nice warm room.

Beatrice went back to sleep, using poor Brackley as pillow.

Four o'clock come, five o'clock come, and still Brackley waiting for Auntie to cough and she wouldn't cough. This time so he have a sizeable stone in his hand and he make up his mind that the moment Auntie cough he going to fling the stone at the window even if he wake up everybody in the street. Sleep killing Brackley but the doorway small and he bend up there like a piece of wire, catching cramp and unable to shift position. In fact, between five and halfpast Brackley think he hear Auntie cough and he make to get up and couldn't move, all the joints frozen in the damp and cold.

He shake Beatrice roughly. 'Auntie cough,' he say.

'I didn't hear,' Beatrice say.

'I hear,' Brackley say, and he stretch out slowly and get up.

Brackley augment the stone he had with three others and he fling his hand back and he pelt the stones on the people glass window before Beatrice know what he doing.

Well glass cracks and break and splinters fly all about and the noise sound as if the glasshouse in Kew Gardens⁷ falling down. Same time Auntie start one set of coughing.

'You see?' Brackley say, 'I tell you Auntie was coughing!'

'You fool!' Beatrice say. 'Look what you have done! You had better go quickly before you cause further trouble.'

And before Brackley know what happening Beatrice hustle him out to the pavement and shut the gate.

Well a kind of fore-day light⁸ was falling at that hour of the morning and when Aunty fling open the window to see what happening, she see Brackley stand up out there. Only, she not so sure, because Brackley blend in nicely with the kind of half-light half-dark. But all the same, Aunty begin to scream murder and thief.

Brackley take off as if he on the Ascot racecourse.⁹

Some nights later he tell the boys the episode, making it sound like a good joke though at the time he was frighten like hell. But that was a mistake he make, because since that time whenever the boys see him they hailing out:

'Brackley! You still waiting for Aunty to cough?'

1957

Endnotes

- Note 1: Hangout or gathering (slang).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Romantic encounter or date with a woman.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Area of north London; "Clapham Common": a park in south London; "Chiswick": area of west London; "Mile End": area of east London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Area in west London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Public transport.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Site of a well-known antiques and secondhand market.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Possibly Marble Arch and Notting Hill Gate (which is a train station). Selvon often makes reference to London landmarks in his work.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Train stations.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Town in south London, a borough of London, and for a while was home to London's main airport.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Busy square in central London and a tourist attraction.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Inhibition. The migrants are reproducing stereotypes of Swedish women.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: County in southeast England.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: In the early to mid-20th century, Londoners would travel to Kent to pick hops (flowers that give beer its bitter taste) in the hop gardens.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The *Evening Standard* was a major newspaper with conservative leanings at the time.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Caribbean island under the rule of the British Empire until 1962.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Botanical garden in southwest London with large glass greenhouses.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: West Indian English for the nature of the light at sunrise.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Prestigious horse racing track in England.[Return to reference 9](#)

M. NOURBESE PHILIP

Marlene Nourbese Philip (b. 1947), publishing recently as M. NourbeSe Philip, was born on the island of Tobago and raised on the island of Trinidad. She received her B.Sc. in economics at the University of the West Indies (1968), before completing a master's degree in political science (1970) and a law degree (1973) at the University of Western Ontario. She practiced law for seven years in Toronto, where she still lives, before turning full-time to writing poetry, novels, essays, and plays. Her book-length poem *Zong!* (2008) reexamines a famous eighteenth-century case of enslaved people thrown overboard for insurance savings. Her poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language," from her third book of poetry, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989), considers the estrangement of the postcolonial and female subject within the imposed colonial language of English. She experiments with typography, wordplay, multiple voices, and discourses to give visible form to this linguistic imprisonment—and to her witty and violent attempts at subversion.

Discourse on the Logic of Language

English
is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign language,
language
/anguish
anguish
—a foreign anguish.

EN IT WAS BORN, THE MOTHER HELD HER NEWBORN CHILD CLOSE: SHE
AN THEN TO LICK IT ALL OVER. THE CHILD WHIMPERED A LITTLE, BUT
THE MOTHER'S TONGUE MOVED FASTER AND STRONGER OVER ITS BODY,
REW SILENT—THE MOTHER TURNING IT THIS WAY AND THAT UNDER
TONGUE, UNTIL SHE HAD TONGUED IT CLEAN OF THE CREAMY WHITE
STANCE COVERING ITS BODY.

English is
my father tongue.
A father tongue is
a foreign language,
therefore English is
a foreign language
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother
tongue
my mammy tongue
my mummy tongue
my momsy tongue
my modder tongue
my ma tongue?

I have no mother
tongue
no mother to tongue
no tongue to mother
to mother
tongue
me

I must therefore be tongu

dumb
dumb-tongued
dub¹-tongued
damn dumb
tongue

EDICT I

*Every owner of slaves shall,
wherever possible, ensure
that his slaves belong to as
many ethno-linguistic groups
as possible. If they cannot
speak to each other, they
cannot then foment rebellion
and revolution.*

Those parts of the brain chiefly responsible for speech are named after two learned nineteenth century doctors, the eponymous Doctors Wernicke and Broca² respectively.

Dr. Broca believed the size of the brain determined intelligence; he devoted much of his time to 'proving' that white males of the Caucasian race had larger brains than, and were therefore superior to, women, Blacks and other peoples of colour.

Understanding and recognition of the spoken word takes place in Wernicke's area—the left temporal lobe, situated next to the auditory cortex; from there relevant information passes to Broca's area—situated in the left frontal cortex—which then forms the response and passes it on to the motor cortex. The motor cortex controls the muscles of speech.

MOTHER THEN PUT HER FINGERS INTO HER CHILD'S MOUTH—GENTLY
CING IT OPEN; SHE TOUCHES HER TONGUE TO THE CHILD'S TONGUE,
HOLDING THE TINY MOUTH OPEN, SHE BLOWS INTO IT—HARD. SHE
BLOWING WORDS—HER WORDS, HER MOTHER'S WORDS, THOSE OF
MOTHER'S MOTHER, AND ALL THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE—INTO HER
UGHTER'S MOUTH.

but I have

a dumb tongue

tongue dumb

father tongue

and english is

my mother tongue

is

my father tongue

is a foreign lan lan lang

language

l/anguish

anguish

a foreign anguish

is english—

another tongue

my mother

mammy

mummy

moder

mater

macer

moder³

tongue

mothertongue

tongue mother

tongue me

mothertongue me

mother me

touch me

with the tongue of your

lan lan lang

language
l/anguish
anguish
english
is a foreign anguish

EDICT II

*Every slave caught
speaking his native
language shall be
severely punished.
Where necessary,
removal of the tongue is
recommended. The
offending organ, when
removed, should be
hung on high in a
central place, so that all
may see and tremble.*

A tapering, blunt-tipped, muscular, soft and fleshy organ describes

- (a) the penis.
- (b) the tongue.
- (c) neither of the above.
- (d) both of the above.

In man the tongue is

- (a) the principal organ of taste.

- (b) the principal organ of articulate speech.
- (c) the principal organ of oppression and exploitation.
- (d) all of the above.

The tongue

- (a) is an interwoven bundle of striated muscle running in three planes.
- (b) is fixed to the jawbone.
- (c) has an outer covering of a mucous membrane covered with papillae.
- (d) contains ten thousand taste buds, none of which is sensitive to the taste of foreign words.

Air is forced out of the lungs up the throat to the larynx where it causes the vocal cords to vibrate and create sound. The metamorphosis from sound to intelligible word requires

- (a) the lip, tongue and jaw all working together.
- (b) a mother tongue.
- (c) the overseer's whip.
- (d) all of the above or none.

1989

Endnotes

- Note 1: Type of African Caribbean performance poetry, named after "dub music," or remixed reggae-style music. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Pierre Paul Broca (1824–1880), French physician; Carl Wernicke (1848–1905), German physician. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mother (archaic Scots, Swedish, etc.). "Mater": mother (Latin). "Macer": lean, poor (Latin). [Return to reference 3](#)

SALMAN RUSHDIE

In these excerpts from two essays in his collection *Imaginary Homelands*, fiction writer Salman Rushdie (b. 1947; see the headnote to him and his story "The Prophet's Hair" later in this volume) claims both Britishness and the English language for immigrant writers in England. Lured by a dream-England, such writers have often been disappointed by exclusionary racial attitudes in their new homeland. Transplanted and culturally plural, they write out of multiple literary inheritances, including the literature of exile and displacement. Rushdie counters the nativist view of English as an imperial yoke that must be thrown off: he recounts the spread of English as a world language, describes its indigenization by the non-English, and claims it as a vital and expressive South Asian literary language, with its own history and tradition.

[The British Indian Writer and a Dream-England]

* * *

So if I am to speak for Indian writers in England I would say this, paraphrasing G. V. Desani's H. Hatterr: The migrations of the fifties and sixties happened. 'We are. We are here.'¹ And we are not willing to be excluded from any part of our heritage; which heritage includes both a Bradford-born Indian kid's right to be treated as a full member of British society, and also the right of any member of this post-diaspora community to draw on its roots for its art, just as all the world's community of displaced writers has always done. (I'm thinking, for instance, of Grass's Danzig-become-Gdansk, of Joyce's abandoned Dublin, of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Maxine Hong Kingston and Milan Kundera² and many others. It's a long list.)

Let me override at once the faintly defensive note that has crept into these last few remarks. The Indian writer, looking back at India, does so through guilt-tinted spectacles. (I am of course, once more, talking about myself.) I am speaking now of those of us who emigrated . . . and I suspect that there are times when the move seems wrong to us all, when we seem, to ourselves, post-lapsarian men and women. We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork.³ And as a result—as my use of the Christian notion of the Fall indicates—we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may

provide us with such angles. Or it may be that that is simply what we must think in order to do our work.

* * *

England's Indian writers are by no means all the same type of animal. Some of us, for instance, are Pakistani. Others Bangladeshi. Others West, or East, or even South African. And V. S. Naipaul,⁴ by now, is something else entirely. This word 'Indian' is getting to be a pretty scattered concept. Indian writers in England include political exiles, first-generation migrants, affluent expatriates whose residence here is frequently temporary, naturalized Britons, and people born here who may never have laid eyes on the subcontinent. Clearly, nothing that I say can apply across all these categories. But one of the interesting things about this diverse community is that, as far as Indo-British fiction is concerned, its existence changes the ball game, because that fiction is in future going to come as much from addresses in London, Birmingham and Yorkshire as from Delhi or Bombay.

One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.

But the British Indian writer simply does not have the option of rejecting English, anyway. His children, her children, will grow up speaking it, probably as a first language; and in the forging of a British Indian identity the English language is of central importance. It must, in spite of everything, be embraced. (The word 'translation'

comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.)

To be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definition. What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to Western ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? These questions are all a single, existential question: How are we to live in the world?

I do not propose to offer, prescriptively, any answers to these questions; only to state that these are some of the issues with which each of us will have to come to terms.

To turn my eyes outwards now, and to say a little about the relationship between the Indian writer and the majority white culture in whose midst he lives, and with which his work will sooner or later have to deal:

In common with many Bombay-raised middle-class children of my generation, I grew up with an intimate knowledge of, and even sense of friendship with, a certain kind of England: a dream-England composed of Test Matches at Lord's presided over by the voice of John Arlott, at which Freddie Trueman bowled unceasingly and without success at Polly Umrigar;⁵ of Enid Blyton and Billy Bunter, in which we were even prepared to smile indulgently at portraits such as 'Hurree Jamset Ram Singh', 'the dusky nabob of Bhanipur'.⁶ I wanted to come to England. I couldn't wait. And to be fair, England has done all right by me; but I find it a little difficult to be properly grateful. I can't escape the view that my relatively easy ride is not the result of the dream-England's famous sense of tolerance and fair

play, but of my social class, my freak fair skin and my 'English' English accent. Take away any of these, and the story would have been very different. Because of course the dream-England is no more than a dream.

Sadly, it's a dream from which too many white Britons refuse to awake. Recently, on a live radio programme, a professional humorist asked me, in all seriousness, why I objected to being called a wog.⁷ He said he had always thought it a rather charming word, a term of endearment. 'I was at the zoo the other day,' he revealed, 'and a zoo keeper told me that the wogs were best with the animals; they stuck their fingers in their ears and wiggled them about and the animals felt at home.' The ghost of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh walks among us still.

As Richard Wright⁸ found long ago in America, black and white descriptions of society are no longer compatible. Fantasy, or the mingling of fantasy and naturalism, is one way of dealing with these problems. It offers a way of echoing in the form of our work the issues faced by all of us: how to build a new, 'modern' world out of an old, legend-haunted civilization, an old culture which we have brought into the heart of a newer one. But whatever technical solutions we may find, Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of 'whole sight'.

* * *

Art is a passion of the mind. And the imagination works best when it is most free. Western writers have always felt free to be eclectic in their selection of theme, setting, form; Western visual artists have, in this century, been happily raiding the visual storehouses of Africa, Asia, the Philippines. I am sure that we must grant ourselves an equal freedom.

Let me suggest that Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition, quite apart from their own racial history. It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. We can quite legitimately claim as our ancestors the Huguenots,⁹ the Irish, the Jews; the past to which we belong is an English past, the history of immigrant Britain. Swift, Conrad, Marx are as much our literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy.¹ America, a nation of immigrants, has created great literature out of the phenomenon of cultural transplantation, out of examining the ways in which people cope with a new world; it may be that by discovering what we have in common with those who preceded us into this country, we can begin to do the same.

I stress this is only one of many possible strategies. But we are inescapably international writers at a time when the novel has never been a more international form (a writer like Borges speaks of the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson on his work; Heinrich Böll² acknowledges the influence of Irish literature; cross-pollination is everywhere); and it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents. My own—selected half consciously, half not—include Gogol, Cervantes, Kafka, Melville, Machado de Assis;³ a polyglot family tree, against which I measure myself, and to which I would be honoured to belong.

There's a beautiful image in Saul Bellow's latest novel, *The Dean's December*.⁴ The central character, the Dean, Corde, hears a dog barking wildly somewhere. He imagines that the barking is the dog's protest against the limit of dog experience. 'For God's sake,' the dog is saying, 'open the universe a little more!' And because Bellow is, of course, not really talking about dogs, or not only about dogs, I have the feeling that the dog's rage, and its desire, is also mine, ours, everyone's. 'For God's sake, open the universe a little more!'

Endnotes

- Note 1: From *All About H. Hatterr* (1948) by the Indian novelist G. V. Desani (1909–2000).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
Czech novelist (b. 1929). “Grass’s Danzig-become-Gdansk”: Polish city known until the end of World War II as Danzig (its German name) and known today as Gdansk; the city features prominently in a trilogy by the German novelist Günter Grass (1927–2015). “Joyce’s abandoned Dublin”: birthplace of the Irish writer James Joyce (1882–1941) and the setting for much of his work, although Joyce spent most of his adult life outside Dublin, in Paris, Trieste, and Zurich. “Isaac Bashevis Singer”: Polish American writer (1904–1991). “Maxine Hong Kingston”: Chinese American writer (b. 1940).
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Inverting, that is, the Muslim prohibition against eating pork as unclean and the Hindu prohibition against crossing the ocean (“black water”).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Trinidad-born English writer of Indian descent (1932–2018).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pahlān Ratanjī Umrigar (1926–2006), Indian cricket player. “Test Matches at Lord’s”: cricket matches played at Lord’s Cricket Ground in London. “John Arlott”: English cricket commentator and writer (1914–1991). “Freddie Trueman”: Fred Trueman (1931–2006), English cricket player.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Character who speaks stereotypically comic English in the “Famous Five” series of children’s books by English author Enid Blyton (1897–1968), whose work has been criticized for its racism. “Billy Bunter”: key character in the Greyfriars School stories published from 1908 to 1940 in the boys’ weekly magazine *The Magnet* by Charles Hamilton (1876–1961), writing under the pen name Frank Richards.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Foreigner (derogatory term).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: American fiction writer and essayist (1908–1960).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Protestants who emigrated from France in the 16th and 17th centuries because of religious persecution.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Bengali intellectual and social and religious reformer (1772–1833). Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), Anglo-Irish writer. Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Polish novelist who lived in England and wrote in English. Karl Marx (1818–1883), German social theorist who spent much of his adult life in England. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Bengali poet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: German writer (1917–1985). Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), Argentinean writer. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), Scottish writer.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Joaquim María Machado de Assis (1839–1908), Brazilian writer. Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), Russian writer. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616), Spanish writer. Franz Kafka (1883–1924), Czech writer. Herman Melville (1819–1891), American writer.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Novel (1982) by Bellow (1915–2005), American novelist.[Return to reference 4](#)

[English Is an Indian Literary Language]

I'll begin from an obvious starting place. English is by now the world language. It achieved this status partly as a result of the physical colonization of a quarter of the globe by the British, and it remains ambiguous but central to the affairs of just about all the countries to whom it was given, along with mission schools, trunk roads¹ and the rules of cricket, as a gift of the British colonizers.

But its present-day pre-eminence is not solely—perhaps not even primarily—the result of the British legacy. It is also the effect of the primacy of the United States of America in the affairs of the world. This second impetus towards English could be termed a kind of linguistic neo-colonialism, or just plain pragmatism on the part of many of the world's governments and educationists, according to your point of view.

As for myself, I don't think it is always necessary to take up the anti-colonial—or is it post-colonial?—cudgels against English. What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it—assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.

To take the case of India, only because it's the one with which I'm most familiar. The debate about the appropriateness of English in post-British India has been raging ever since 1947;² but today, I find, it is a debate which has meaning only for the older generation. The children of independent India seem not to think of English as being irredeemably tainted by its colonial provenance. They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to hand.

(I am simplifying, of course, but the point is broadly true.)

There is also an interesting North–South divide in Indian attitudes to English. In the North, in the so-called ‘Hindi belt’, where the capital, Delhi, is located, it is possible to think of Hindi as a future national language; but in South India, which is at present suffering from the attempts of central government to *impose* this national language on it, the resentment of Hindi is far greater than of English. After spending quite some time in South India, I’ve become convinced that English is an essential language in India, not only because of its technical vocabularies and the international communication which it makes possible, but also simply to permit two Indians to talk to each other in a tongue which neither party hates.

Incidentally, in West Bengal, where there is a State-led move against English, the following graffito, a sharp dig at the State’s Marxist chief minister, Jyoti Basu, appeared on a wall, in English: it said, ‘My son won’t learn English; your son won’t learn English; but Jyoti Basu will send his son abroad to learn English.’

One of the points I want to make is that what I’ve said indicates, I hope, that Indian society and Indian literature have a complex and developing relationship with the English language. * * *

English literature has its Indian branch. By this I mean the literature of the English language. This literature is also Indian literature. There is no incompatibility here. If history creates complexities, let us not try to simplify them.

So: English is an Indian literary language, and by now, thanks to writers like Tagore, Desani, Chaudhuri, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai³ and others, it has quite a pedigree.

* * *

In my own case, I have constantly been asked whether I am British, or Indian. The formulation ‘Indian-born British writer’ has been invented to explain me. But, as I said last night, my new book deals with Pakistan. So what now? ‘British-resident Indo-Pakistani writer’? You see the folly of trying to contain writers inside passports.

One of the most absurd aspects of this quest for national authenticity is that—as far as India is concerned, anyway—it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw. The only people who seriously believe this are religious extremists. The rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a *mélange* of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal⁴ and contemporary Coca-Cola American. To say nothing of Muslim, Buddhist, Jain,⁵ Christian, Jewish, British, French, Portuguese, Marxist, Maoist, Trotskyist, Vietnamese, capitalist, and of course Hindu elements. Eclecticism, the ability to take from the world what seems fitting and to leave the rest, has always been a hallmark of the Indian tradition, and today it is at the centre of the best work being done both in the visual arts and in literature.

* * *

As far as Eng. Lit. itself is concerned, I think that if *a//* English literatures could be studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world, and we could see that Eng. Lit. has never been in better shape, because the world language now also possesses a world literature, which is proliferating in every conceivable direction.

The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago. * * *

1983

Endnotes

- Note 1: Main roads, such as the Grand Trunk Road, the immense highway between Calcutta and Amritsar constructed during the British Raj.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: When the British relinquished control of India.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Bengali poet; G. V. Desani (1909–2000), Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897–1999), Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), Raja Rao (1909–2006), Anita Desai (b. 1937): Indian fiction and nonfiction writers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Dynasty of Muslim emperors who reigned in India, 1526–1858.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Jainism is one of India's oldest religions.[Return to reference 5](#)

GRACE NICHOLS

Born and raised in British Guiana (now Guyana), Grace Nichols (b. 1950) worked as a freelance journalist after receiving a diploma in communications from the University of Guyana. She left the Caribbean for England in 1977.

In “Epilogue” and other poems, Nichols memorializes the uprooting of Africans and their languages when slavery brought these peoples to the West Indies, where a new tongue grew “from the root of the old one.” The new tongue melded English with African and European languages, and despite the stigma that once attached to it, Nichols celebrates it as a vibrant medium for literature. Like Louise Bennett, she writes of black immigrants’ reverse colonization of the English language and of English society. In *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems* (1984) and other of her subsequent volumes, the speaker—appropriating and reversing cultural stereotypes—transforms London’s landscape by virtue of her robust physical, verbal, and cultural presence. In 2021 Nichols won the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry.

Epilogue

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung

1983

The Fat Black Woman Goes Shopping

Shopping in London winter
is a real drag for the fat black woman
going from store to store
in search of accommodating clothes
and de weather so cold
5
Look at the frozen thin mannequins
fixing her with grin
and de pretty face salesgals
exchanging slimming glances
thinking she don't notice
10
Lord is aggravating
Nothing soft and bright and billowing
to flow like breezy sunlight
when she walking
15
The fat black woman curses in Swahili/Yoruba
and nation language¹ under her breathing
all this journeying and journeying
The fat black woman could only conclude
that when it come to fashion
the choice is lean
20
Nothing much beyond size 14

1984

Endnotes

- Note 1: Term for creolized English coined by West Indian poet Kamau Brathwaite (1930–2020). “Swahili”: East African language. “Yoruba”: Nigerian language. [Return to reference 1](#)

Wherever I Hang

I leave me people, me land, me home
For reasons, I not too sure
I forsake de sun
And de humming-bird splendour
Had big rats in de floorboard
5 So I pick up me new-world-self
And come, to this place call England
At first I feeling like I in dream—
De misty greyness
I touching de walls to see if they real
10 They solid to de seam
And de people pouring from de underground system¹
Like beans
And when I look up to de sky
I see Lord Nelson² high—too high to lie
15
And is so I sending home photos of myself
Among de pigeons and de snow
And is so I warding off de cold
And is so, little by little
I begin to change my calypso ways
20 Never visiting nobody
Before giving them clear warning
And waiting me turn in queue^o
Now, after all this time
I get accustom to de English life
25 But I still miss back-home side
To tell you de truth
I don't know really where I belaang

Yes, divided to de ocean

Wherever I hang me knickers—that's my home.

1989



"Stop the Coloured Invasion" protest amid the lions of Trafalgar Square, London, January 1, 1959. After the British Nationality Act of 1948, citizens of the British colonies were allowed to enter and work in the United Kingdom without a visa. As people of African and Asian descent arrived from the British Empire and Commonwealth in the 1950s and 1960s, some Whites denounced the policies that permitted immigration. As a result, laws permitting entry were tightened in the 1960s, and politicians such as Member of Parliament Enoch Powell fomented anxieties that immigration was destroying Britain and would lead to civil strife.

Endnotes

- Note 1: The London subway system.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British Admiral Horatio Nelson (1758–1805), whose naval victories are commemorated by a tall column surmounted by his statue in Trafalgar Square, London. There are also monuments to him in the Caribbean, where he spent much of his career.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *in line*[Return to reference °](#)

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON

Born in Jamaica in 1952, Linton Kwesi Johnson immigrated to England at the age of eleven. He grew up in Brixton, South London, where he was shocked by the racist hostility. After he graduated with a B.A. in sociology from Goldsmiths, University of London, he began to publish collections of poetry, beginning with *Voices of the Living and the Dead* (1974). His influential recordings of his poetry set to reggae music, such as his first album *Dread Beat an' Blood* (1977), reached a wide audience. In 2002 he became the second living poet published in the Penguin Modern Classics series.

Building on the example of poets such as Claude McKay and Louise Bennett but more fiercely assailing the norms of Standardized English, Johnson represents Black British speech in words spelled phonetically, sentences without punctuation, and rhythms surging with reggae and other African diasporic musical traditions. In stylized versions of the voices of working-class immigrants to Britain, poems such as "Inglan Is a Bitch" chronicle their relentless struggle with racism, violence, discrimination, incarceration, and police brutality. Although both Johnson's poem and Claude McKay's "Old England" (included earlier in this volume) draw on African Caribbean speech, McKay's buoyantly idealized London could hardly differ more from the grimly repressive London of "Inglan Is a Bitch."

Inglan Is a Bitch

wen mi jus come to Landan toun
mi use to work pan di andahgroun
but workin pan di andahgroun
yu dont get fi know your way aroun

5 Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runin whe fram it

10 mi get a likkle^o jab in a big otell
an awftah a while, mi woz doin quite well
dem staat mi awf as a dish-washah
but wen mi tek a stack, mi noh tun clack-watchah!¹

15 Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
noh baddah try fi hide fram it

20 wen dem gi you di likkle wage packit^o
fus dem rab it wid dem big tax rackit^o
yu haffi struggle fi mek enz meet
an wen yu goh a yu bed yu jus cant sleep

25 Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch fi true
a noh lie mi a tell, a true

me use to work dig ditch wen it cowl noh bitch^o
25 mi did^o strang like a mule, but, bwoy, mi did fool

den awftah a while mi jus stap dhu owevahtime
den awftah a while mi jus phu dung^o mi tool

30 Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
yu haffi know how fi suvive in it

35 well mi dhu^o day wok an mi dhu nite wok
mi dhu clean wok and mi dhu dutty^o wok
dem seh dat black man is very lazy
but if yu si how mi wok yu woodah seh mi crazy

40 Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
yu bettah face up to it

dem have a likkle facktri up inna Brackly
inna disya facktri all dem dhu is pack crackry
fi di laas fifteen years dem get mi laybah
now awftah fifteen years mi fall out a fayvah

45 Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch
dere's no runin whe fram it

50 mi know dem have wok, wok in abundant
yet still, dem mek mi redundant^o
now, at fifty-five mi getin quite ole
yet still, dem sen mi fi goh draw dole^o

Inglan is a bitch
dere's no escapin it
Inglan is a bitch fi true
is whe wi a goh dhu bout it?

Endnotes

- Note 1: But when I started to make money, I didn't turn into a clock-watcher (that is, a lazy worker).[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *little*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *check*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fraud*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *cold, no shit*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *was*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *put down*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *did*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *dirty*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *they laid me off*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *welfare payments*[Return to reference °](#)

BERNARDINE EVARISTO

Born in London in 1959, the daughter of an English mother and Nigerian father, Bernardine Evaristo was educated at the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama and at the University of London, and was a founding member of the London-based Theatre of Black Women. The author of a number of books in prose and verse, she made her reputation with two novels-in-verse exploring hybrid identities and histories: the semiautobiographical *Lara* (1997), which traces its mixed-race heroine's English, Nigerian, Brazilian, and Irish roots, and *The Emperor's Babe* (2001), for which "Amo Amas Amat" is the prologue. In 2019 Evaristo became the first woman of Black British heritage to win the Booker Prize. She won it for her novel *Girl, Woman, Other*. She shared the honor with Margaret Atwood, who also won that year for *The Testaments*.

Set in a teeming multicultural London in the year 211 C.E., when Britain was a far-flung colony at the periphery of the Roman Empire, *The Emperor's Babe* tells the story of Zuleika, the hip, restless, playful daughter of Sudanese immigrants. Married at a young age to an often absent nobleman, she eventually has an affair with visiting Septimius Severus—a historical figure, an emperor of African origin who ruled over Rome and died in Britain's York. Delving into Britain's deep past, Evaristo's novel-in-verse humorously provincializes London, representing it not as the energizing hub of empire but, in the Roman scheme of things, as an underdeveloped backwater. Against the idea that Britain was racially or culturally homogeneous before the arrival of postwar, *Windrush*-era immigrants, Evaristo represents it as already richly multicultural in ancient times. In her verbal amalgamations, she zigzags from street slang to high diction and among multiple foreign tongues, highlighting the multinational roots of the English language. Both historical and humorously anachronistic, the poem's linguistic mix is emblematic of both the ancient and the contemporary cultural hybridization of Britain.

From The Emperor's Babe

Amo Amas Amat¹

Who do you love? Who *do* you love,
when the man you married goes off

for months on end, quelling rebellions
at the frontiers, or playing hot-shot senator in Rome;

5 his flashy villa on the Palatine Hill,² home
to another woman, I hear,

one who has borne him offspring.
My days are spent roaming this house,

10 its vast mosaic walls full of the scenes on Olympus,
for my husband loves melodrama.

They say his mistress is an actress,
a flaxen-Fräulein type, from Germania Superior.³

Oh, everyone envied me, *Illa Bella Negreeta*!⁴
born in the back of a shop on Gracechurch Street,⁵

15 who got hitched to a Roman nobleman,
whose parents sailed out of Khartoum⁶ on a barge,

no burnished throne, no poop of beaten gold,
but packed with vomiting brats

and cows releasing warm turds
on to their bare feet. Thus perfumed,

20 they made it to Londinium on a donkey,
with only a thin purse and a fat dream.

Here in the drizzle of this wild west town
Dad wandered the streets looking for work,
25 but there was no room at the inn,
so he set up shop on the kerb

and sold sweet cakes which Mum made.
(He's told me this story a mille^o times.)

Now he owns several shops, selling everything
30 from vino to shoes, veggies to tools,
and he employs all sorts to work in them,
a Syrian, Tunisian, Jew, Persian,

hopefuls just off the olive barge from Gaul,⁷
in fact anyone who'll work for pebbles.

35 When Felix came after me, Dad was in ecstasy,
father-in-law to Lucius Aurelius Felix, no less.

I was spotted at the baths of Cheapside,⁸
just budding, and my fate was sealed

by a man thrice my age and thrice my girth,
40 all at sweet eleven—even then Dad

thought I was getting past it.
Then I was sent off to a snooty Roman bitch

called Clarissa for decorum classes,
learnt how to talk, eat and fart,

how to get my amo amas amat right, and ditch

my second-generation plebby creole.⁹

45 *Zuleika accepta est.*
 *Zuleika delicata est.*¹
 Zuleika bloody goody-two-shoes est.

50 But I dreamt of creating mosaics,
 of remaking my town with bright stones and glass.

 But no! Numquam!^o It's not allowed.
 Sure, Felix brings me presents, when he deigns

 to come west. I've had Chinese silk, a marble
 figurine from Turkey, gold earrings

55 shaped like dolphins, and I have the deepest
 fondness for my husband, of course,

 sort of, though he spills over me like dough
 and I'm tempted to call Cook mid coitus

60 to come trim his sides so that he fits me.
 Then it's puff and *Ciao, baby!*

 Solitudoh, solitudee, solitudargh!

2001

Endnotes

- Note 1: I love, you love, he/she loves (Latin conjugations).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Historic center of ancient Rome.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Province of the Roman Empire (now parts of Switzerland, France, and Germany). "Fräulein": unmarried woman (German).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *The Beautiful Negress!* (Italian).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A main road in modern London, site of the early Roman settlement called “Londinium” established around 43 C.E. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Now capital of Sudan. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Large region of Western Europe, including most of modern-day France, under Roman rule from 58 B.C.E. to 486 C.E. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Street in London. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A hybrid language. “Plebby”: vulgar (from *plebeian*, or lower-class). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Zuleika is accepted. Zuleika is delicate (Latin). [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *thousand (Latin)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Never!* [Return to reference °](#)

DALJIT NAGRA

Look, We Have Coming to Dover! (2007) is Daljit Nagra's first, Forward Prize-winning collection of poems, its title alluding to Matthew Arnold and W. H. Auden and inflecting an iconic British site with Indianized English. Nagra was born in 1966 in Yiewsley, west London, to Sikh Punjabi parents who had come to England in the 1950s. He grew up in Britain between Punjabi and English cultures, and his work, including the poems in *Tippoo Sultan's Incredible White-Man-Eating Tiger Toy Machine!!!* (2011) and *British Museum* (2017), as well as an English retelling of the *Ramayana* (2013), weaves together his disparate inheritances.

His poem "A Black History of the English-Speaking Peoples"—a title that ironically recalls Winston Churchill's monumental *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*—meditates on Shakespeare's Globe from an Asian British perspective. Although some of Nagra's poetry is in an ebulliently performative Indian English, this poem and others are written in a Standard English richly threaded with literary allusions. Nagra lovingly and mockingly echoes poets who helped forge the language and forms of his poetry, writers such as Shakespeare, Tennyson, Walcott, and Auden (whose anvil-like stanza form Nagra adapts from the poem "Spain"). He writes in this high literary English as an insider-outsider: he self-consciously extends a literary canon that goes back to Shakespeare, even as he recalls, from within the heart of the former empire, Britain's sometimes exploitative and racist history. Combining insider and rebel, perpetuator and opponent, mimic and insurgent, Nagra acknowledges his complicity in colonialism even as he disavows it, resists the empire even as he renovates its language and literary traditions.

A Black History of the English-Speaking Peoples¹

I

A king's invocations at the Globe Theatre²
spin me from my stand to a time when boyish
bravado and cannonade
and plunder were enough to woo the regal seat.

5 That the stuff of Elizabethan art and a nation
of walled gardens in a local one-upmanship
would tame the four-cornered
world for Empire's dominion seems inconceivable.

Between the birth and the fire and rebirth of the
Globe

10 the visions of Albion³ led to a Rule Britannia
of trade-winds-and-Gulf-Stream
all-conquering fleets that aroused theatres

for lectures on Hottentots⁴ and craniology,⁵
whilst Eden was paraded in Kew.⁶

15 Between *Mayflower* and *Windrush*⁷
(with each *necessary murder*⁸) the celebrated

embeddings of imperial gusto where jungles
were surmounted so the light of learning be spread
to help sobbing suttees⁹

20 give up the ghost of a husband's flaming pyre.

II

So much for yesterday,¹ but today's time-honoured
televised clashes repeat the flag of a book burning²
and May Day's Mohican
Churchill³ and all that shock and awe⁴

25 that brings me back to Mr Wanamaker's⁵ Globe.
An American's thatched throwback to the king
of the canon! I watch the actor
as king, from the cast of masterful Robeson.⁶

The crowd, too, seem a hotchpotch from the pacts
and sects of our ebb and flow.⁷ My forbears played
30 their part for the Empire's quid^o
pro quo by assisting the rule and divide⁸ of their ilk.

Did such relations bear me to this stage?
Especially with Macaulay⁹ in mind, who claimed the
passing
of the imperial sceptre would highlight
35 *the imperishable empire of our arts . . .* ¹

So does the red of Macaulay's map run through
my blood? Am I a noble scruff who hopes a proud
academy might canonise
40 his poems for their faith in canonical allusions?

Is my voice phoney over these oft-heard beats?
Well if my voice feels vexatious, what can I but pray
that it reign Bolshie²
through puppetry and hypocrisy full of gung-ho fury!

III

45 The heyday Globe incited brave new verse³
modelled on the past, where time's frictions

courted Shakespeare's corruptions
for tongue's mastery of the pageant subject. Perhaps

50 the Globe should be my muse! I'm happy digging
for my England's good garden⁴ to bear again.
My garden's only a state
of mind, where it's easy aligning myself with a
'turncoat'

55 T. E. Lawrence⁵ and a *half-naked fakir*⁶ and always
the groundling. Perhaps to aid the succession
of this language of the world,
for the poet weeding the roots, for the debate

in ourselves, now we're bound to the wheels
of global power,⁷ we should tend the manorial
slime⁸—that legacy
60 offending the outcasts who fringe our circles.

IV

Who believes a bleached yarn? Would we openly
admit the Livingstone⁹ spirit turned Kurtz,¹ our flag
is a union of black and blue
flapping in the anthems of haunted rain . . . ?

65 Coming clean would surely give us greater distance
than this king at the Globe, whose head seems
cluttered
with golden-age bumph,²
whose suffering ends him agog at the stars.

V

I applaud and stroll toward Westminster,³

70 yet softly tonight the waters of Britannia bobble
 with flotillas of tea and white gold
 cotton and sugar and the sweetness-and-light⁴

blood lettings and ultimately red-faced Suez.⁵
 And how swiftly the tide removes from the scene
 the bagpipe clamouring
 75 garrisons with the field-wide scarlet soldiery

and the martyr's cry: *Every man die at his post!*⁶
 Till what's ahead are the upbeat lovers who gaze
 from the London Eye⁷
 80 at multinationals lying along the sanitised Thames.

2011

Endnotes

- Note 1: See *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (1956–58), a history in four volumes of Great Britain and its former possessions by Winston Churchill (1874–1965). As an ethnic descriptor, “Black” in the British context has sometimes been used to include people not only of African but also of South Asian descent.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: London theater associated with Shakespeare, built in 1599, destroyed by fire in 1613, rebuilt the following year, closed in 1642, and reconstructed near the original site in 1997.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Ancient name for the island of Great Britain. See *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) by the English poet William Blake (1757–1827).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Derogatory term for the native Khoikhoi people of southern Africa.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Study of the shape and size of the skulls of different human races.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: West London suburb. Kew Gardens massively expanded its global collection of plants in the Victorian era.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Ship that in 1948 brought the first large group of West Indian immigrants to Britain. “*Mayflower*,” ship that in 1620 brought the first English Puritan emigrants to Massachusetts.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Phrase that, like the poem’s stanza form, is taken from “Spain” (1937) by W. H. Auden (1907–1973) (see p. 675, above).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Indian widows who immolated themselves on their husbands’ funeral pyres before Britain banned the practice in the 19th century.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: See the refrain of “Yesterday” in Auden’s “Spain” (lines 1ff.) (p. 672, above).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British Muslim protesters were televised burning Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: During May Day demonstrations in London in 2000, a statue of Winston Churchill was given a Mohawk (“Mohican”) hairdo made of turf.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: U.S. military doctrine widely cited during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sam Wanamaker (1919–1993), American expatriate film director and actor who re-created the Globe Theatre.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Paul Robeson (1898–1976), American singer, actor, and civil rights advocate acclaimed for his performances as Othello.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See King Lear addressing his daughter Cordelia: “and we’ll wear out, / In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones, / That ebb and flow by the moon” (*King Lear* 5.3.17–19).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The British Empire employed a “divide and rule” strategy to weaken local powers in India.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), British historian and politician who mandated English language

instruction in Indian schools.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: In a 1833 speech calling for the education of Indians in English ways, Macaulay said: “The scepter may pass away from us. . . . But . . . [t]here is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism: that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.”[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British slang for Bolshevik, Russian revolutionary communist; hence, disobedient, uncooperative.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: See *Brave New World* (1931), a dystopian novel set in London by English writer Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), its title taken from Miranda’s speech in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (5.1.205).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See *Richard II* (2.1.42, 50): “This other Eden, demi-paradise / . . . This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.”[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: British military officer (1888–1935) who, dressing like and identifying with his Arab partners, led a revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I; he became known as Lawrence of Arabia.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Condensed version of Churchill’s insulting reference to Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), leader of the Indian Independence movement.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: See *King Lear* 4.7.46–47: “I am bound / Upon a wheel of fire.”[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: “Some slave is rotting in this manorial lake,” exclaims St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott (1930–2017) in his poem “Ruins of a Great House” (1962), which meditates on the decay of empire by invoking the stench of “rotting lime.”[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: David Livingstone (1813–1873), Scottish medical missionary and explorer in Africa.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Fictional European ivory trader who rules a society of central African natives as a demigod in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (see p. 67).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: That is, superfluous documents; toilet paper.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: London area with Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, and the Houses of Parliament.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Phrase for the beauty and intelligence of culture that English poet Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) borrowed from Irish poet Jonathan Swift (1667–1745).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Egyptian seaport city where an invasion by Britain, France, and Israel failed in 1956, a failure seen as a turning point in the decline of the British Empire.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From “The Defence of Lucknow” (1879) by English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), which celebrates the defenders of the British Residency in the Indian city of Lucknow that fell under siege during the Indian Rebellion of 1857.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Tallest Ferris wheel in Europe, on the south bank of the River Thames.[Return to reference 7](#)

Notes

- °: *one pound sterling*[Return to reference °](#)

DORIS LESSING

1919–2013

Born in Persia (now Iran) to British parents, Doris Lessing (née Tayler) lived in southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) from 1924 to 1949, before settling in England. Her five-novel sequence with the general title *Children of Violence* (beginning with *Martha Quest*, 1952) combines psychological autobiography with powerful explorations of the relationship between Black and White peoples in southern Africa. Her combination of psychological introspection, political analysis, social documentary, and feminism gives a characteristic tone to her novels and short stories. These elements are effectively combined in her novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962), which explores with unexhibitionist frankness the sexual problems of an independent woman while at the same time probing the political conscience of an ex-communist and the needs and dilemmas of a creative writer. In the early 1970s, influenced by the writings of the renegade psychologist R. D. Laing and by the principles of Sufism (the mystical, ecstatic dimension of Islam), Lessing's realistic investigations of social issues took a different turn. In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), she explores myth and fantasy, restrained within a broadly realist context. In a series of novels with the general title *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (written between 1979 and 1983), she draws on her reading of the Old and New Testaments, the Apocrypha, and the Koran and borrows conventions from science fiction to describe the

efforts of a superhuman, extraterrestrial race to guide human history. The novels convey the scope of human suffering in the twentieth century with a rare imaginative power. On completion of this novel sequence, Lessing took the unusual step of publishing two pseudonymous novels (now known jointly as *The Diaries of Jane Somers*, 1983–84), in which she reverted to the realist mode with which she was most widely associated. *The Good Terrorist* (1985) is also written in the style of documentary realism, but *The Fifth Child* (1988) combines elements of realism and fantasy, exploring the effect on a happy family of the birth of a genetically abnormal, nonhuman child.

Her work from the early 1990s on included two candid volumes of autobiography, *Under My Skin* (1994) and *Walking in the Shade* (1997); the four short novels that comprise *The Grandmothers* (2003); *The Cleft* (2007); a clutch of other novels; and a series of short stories. Some of these stories—which deal with racial and social dilemmas as well as with loneliness, the claims of politics, the problems of aging (especially for women), the conflict between the generations, and a whole spectrum of problems of alienation and isolation—have a particular pungency and force. Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007, Lessing was very much a writer of her time, deeply involved with the changing patterns of thought, feeling, and culture during the last sixty years. She consistently explored and tested the boundaries of realist technique, without resort to formal experimentalism. Published just on the cusp of second-wave feminism, the story reprinted here, “To Room Nineteen,” is a psychologically penetrating study of a woman who finds ultimate fulfillment in neither her marriage nor her children and, feeling trapped by traditional gender roles, seeks solitude in—to echo the title of Virginia Woolf’s feminist classic about gender, space, and identity—a room of her own.

To Room Nineteen

This is a story, I suppose, about a failure in intelligence: the Rawlings' marriage was grounded in intelligence.

They were older when they married than most of their married friends: in their well-seasoned late twenties. Both had had a number of affairs, sweet rather than bitter; and when they fell in love—for they did fall in love—had known each other for some time. They joked that they had saved each other “for the real thing.” That they had waited so long (but not too long) for this real thing was to them a proof of their sensible discrimination. A good many of their friends had married young, and now (they felt) probably regretted lost opportunities; while others, still unmarried, seemed to them arid, self-doubting, and likely to make desperate or romantic marriages.

Not only they, but others, felt they were well matched: their friends' delight was an additional proof of their happiness. They had played the same roles, male and female, in this group or set, if such a wide, loosely connected, constantly changing constellation of people could be called a set. They had both become, by virtue of their moderation, their humour, and their abstinence from painful experience people to whom others came for advice. They could be, and were, relied on. It was one of those cases of a man and a woman linking themselves whom no one else had ever thought of linking, probably because of their similarities. But then everyone exclaimed: Of course! How right! How was it we never thought of it before!

And so they married amid general rejoicing, and because of their foresight and their sense for what was probable, nothing was a surprise to them.

Both had well-paid jobs. Matthew was a subeditor on a large London newspaper, and Susan worked in an advertising firm. He was not the stuff of which editors or publicised journalists are made, but

he was much more than “a subeditor,” being one of the essential background people who in fact steady, inspire and make possible the people in the limelight. He was content with this position. Susan had a talent for commercial drawing. She was humorous about the advertisements she was responsible for, but she did not feel strongly about them one way or the other.

Both, before they married, had had pleasant flats, but they felt it unwise to base a marriage on either flat, because it might seem like a submission of personality on the part of the one whose flat it was not. They moved into a new flat in South Kensington on the clear understanding that when their marriage had settled down (a process they knew would not take long, and was in fact more a humorous concession to popular wisdom than what was due to themselves) they would buy a house and start a family.

And this is what happened. They lived in their charming flat for two years, giving parties and going to them, being a popular young married couple, and then Susan became pregnant, she gave up her job, and they bought a house in Richmond. It was typical of this couple that they had a son first, then a daughter, then twins, son and daughter. Everything right, appropriate, and what everyone would wish for, if they could choose. But people did feel these two had chosen; this balanced and sensible family was no more than what was due to them because of their infallible sense for *choosing* right.

And so they lived with their four children in their garden house in Richmond and were happy. They had everything they had wanted and had planned for.

And yet . . .

Well, even this was expected, that there must be a certain flatness. . . .

Yes, yes, of course, it was natural they sometimes felt like this. Like what?

Their life seemed to be like a snake biting its tail. Matthew’s job for the sake of Susan, children, house, and garden—which caravanserai¹ needed a well-paid job to maintain it. And Susan’s

practical intelligence for the sake of Matthew, the children, the house and the garden—which unit would have collapsed in a week without her.

But there was no point about which either could say: “For the sake of *this* is all the rest.” Children? But children can’t be a centre of life and a reason for being. They can be a thousand things that are delightful, interesting, satisfying, but they can’t be a wellspring to live from. Or they shouldn’t be. Susan and Matthew knew that well enough.

Matthew’s job? Ridiculous. It was an interesting job, but scarcely a reason for living. Matthew took pride in doing it well; but he could hardly be expected to be proud of the newspaper: the newspaper he read, *his* newspaper, was not the one he worked for.

Their love for each other? Well, that was nearest it. If this wasn’t a centre, what was? Yes, it was around this point, their love, that the whole extraordinary structure revolved. For extraordinary it certainly was. Both Susan and Matthew had moments of thinking so, of looking in secret disbelief at this thing they had created: marriage, four children, big house, garden, charwomen,² friends, cars . . . and this *thing*, this entity, all of it had come into existence, been blown into being out of nowhere, because Susan loved Matthew and Matthew loved Susan. Extraordinary. So that was the central point, the wellspring.

And if one felt that it simply was not strong enough, important enough, to support it all, well whose fault was that? Certainly neither Susan’s nor Matthew’s. It was in the nature of things. And they sensibly blamed neither themselves nor each other.

On the contrary, they used their intelligence to preserve what they had created from a painful and explosive world: they looked around them, and took lessons. All around them, marriages collapsing, or breaking, or rubbing along (even worse, they felt). They must not make the same mistakes, they must not.

They had avoided the pitfall so many of their friends had fallen into—of buying a house in the country *for the sake of the children*; so that the husband became a weekend husband, a weekend father,

and the wife always careful not to ask what went on in the town flat which they called (in joke) a bachelor flat. No, Matthew was a full-time husband, a full-time father, and at nights, in the big married bed in the big married bedroom (which had an attractive view of the river) they lay beside each other talking and he told her about his day, and what he had done, and whom he had met; and she told him about her day (not as interesting, but that was not her fault) for both knew of the hidden resentments and deprivations of the woman who has lived her own life—and above all, has earned her own living—and is now dependent on a husband for outside interests and money.

Nor did Susan make the mistake of taking a job for the sake of her independence, which she might very well have done, since her old firm, missing her qualities of humour, balance, and sense, invited her often to go back. Children needed their mother to a certain age, that both parents knew and agreed on; and when these four healthy wisely brought-up children were of the right age, Susan would work again, because she knew, and so did he, what happened to women of fifty at the height of their energy and ability, with grown-up children who no longer needed their full devotion.

So here was this couple, testing their marriage, looking after it, treating it like a small boat full of helpless people in a very stormy sea. Well, of course, so it was. . . . The storms of the world were bad, but not too close—which is not to say they were selfishly felt: Susan and Matthew were both well-informed and responsible people. And the inner storms and quicksands were understood and charted. So everything was all right. Everything was in order. Yes, things were under control.

So what did it matter if they felt dry, flat? People like themselves, fed on a hundred books (psychological, anthropological, sociological) could scarcely be unprepared for the dry, controlled wistfulness which is the distinguishing mark of the intelligent marriage. Two people, endowed with education, with discrimination, with judgement, linked together voluntarily from their will to be happy together and to be of use to others—one sees them everywhere,

one knows them, one even is that thing oneself: sadness because so much is after all so little. These two, unsurprised, turned towards each other with even more courtesy and gentle love: this was life, that two people, no matter how carefully chosen, could not be everything to each other. In fact, even to say so, to think in such a way, was banal, they were ashamed to do it.

It was banal, too, when one night Matthew came home late and confessed he had been to a party, taken a girl home and slept with her. Susan forgave him, of course. Except that forgiveness is hardly the word. Understanding, yes. But if you understand something, you don't forgive it, you are the thing itself: forgiveness is for what you *don't* understand. Nor had he *confessed*—what sort of word is that?

The whole thing was not important. After all, years ago they had joked: Of course I'm not going to be faithful to you, no one can be faithful to one other person for a whole lifetime. (And there was the word *faithful*—stupid, all these words, stupid, belonging to a savage old world.) But the incident left both of them irritable. Strange, but they were both bad-tempered, annoyed. There was something unassimilable about it.

Making love splendidly after he had come home that night, both had felt that the idea that Myra Jenkins, a pretty girl met at a party, could be even relevant was ridiculous. They had loved each other for over a decade, would love each other for years more. Who, then, was Myra Jenkins?

Except, thought Susan, unaccountably bad-tempered, she was (is?) the first. In ten years. So either the ten years' fidelity was not important, or she isn't. (No, no, there is something wrong with this way of thinking, there must be.) But if she isn't important, presumably it wasn't important either when Matthew and I first went to bed with each other that afternoon whose delight even now (like a very long shadow at sundown) lays a long, wand-like finger over us. (Why did I say sundown?) Well, if what we felt that afternoon was not important, nothing is important, because if it hadn't been for what we felt, we wouldn't be Mr and Mrs Rawlings with four children, etc., etc. The whole thing is *absurd*—for him to have come

home and told me was absurd. For him not to have told me was absurd. For me to care, or for that matter not to care, is absurd . . . and who is Myra Jenkins? Why, no one at all.

There was only one thing to do, and of course these sensible people did it: they put the thing behind them, and consciously, knowing what they were doing, moved forward into a different phase of their marriage, giving thanks for past good fortune as they did so.

For it was inevitable that the handsome, blond, attractive, manly man, Matthew Rawlings, should be at times tempted (oh, what a word!) by the attractive girls at parties she could not attend because of the four children; and that sometimes he would succumb (a word even more repulsive, if possible) and that she, a good-looking woman in the big well-tended garden at Richmond, would sometimes be pierced as by an arrow from the sky with bitterness. Except that bitterness was not in order, it was out of court. Did the casual girls touch the marriage? They did not. Rather it was they who knew defeat because of the handsome Matthew Rawlings' marriage body and soul to Susan Rawlings.

In that case why did Susan feel (though luckily not for longer than a few seconds at a time) as if life had become a desert, and that nothing mattered, and that her children were not her own?

Meanwhile her intelligence continued to assert that all was well. What if her Matthew did have an occasional sweet afternoon, the odd affair? For she knew quite well, except in her moments of aridity, that they were very happy, that the affairs were not important.

Perhaps that was the trouble? It was in the nature of things that the adventures and delights could no longer be hers, because of the four children and the big house that needed so much attention. But perhaps she was secretly wishing, and even knowing that she did, that the wildness and the beauty could be his. But he was married to her. She was married to him. They were married inextricably. And therefore the gods could not strike him with the real magic, not really. Well, was it Susan's fault that after he came home from an

adventure he looked harassed rather than fulfilled? (In fact, that was how she knew he had been *unfaithful*, because of his sullen air, and his glances at her, similar to hers at him: What is it that I share with this person that shields all delight from me?) But none of it by anybody's fault. (But what did they feel ought to be somebody's fault?) Nobody's fault, nothing to be at fault, no one to blame, no one to offer or to take it . . . and nothing wrong, either, except that Matthew never was really struck, as he wanted to be, by joy; and that Susan was more and more often threatened by emptiness. (It was usually in the garden that she was invaded by this feeling: she was coming to avoid the garden, unless the children or Matthew were with her.) There was no need to use the dramatic words, *unfaithful*, *forgive*, and the rest: intelligence forbade them. Intelligence barred, too, quarrelling, sulking, anger, silences of withdrawal, accusations and tears. Above all, intelligence forbids tears.

A high price has to be paid for the happy marriage with the four healthy children in the large white gardened house.

And they were paying it, willingly, knowing what they were doing. When they lay side by side or breast to breast in the big civilised bedroom overlooking the wild sullied river, they laughed, often, for no particular reason; but they knew it was really because of these two small people, Susan and Matthew, supporting such an edifice on their intelligent love. The laugh comforted them; it saved them both, though from what, they did not know.

They were now both fortyish. The older children, boy and girl were ten and eight, at school. The twins, six, were still at home. Susan did not have nurses or girls to help her: childhood is short; and she did not regret the hard work. Often enough she was bored, since small children can be boring; she was often very tired; but she regretted nothing. In another decade, she would turn herself back into being a woman with a life of her own.

Soon the twins would go to school, and they would be away from home from nine until four. These hours, so Susan saw it, would be the preparation for her own slow emancipation away from the role of

hub-of-the-family into woman-with-her-own-life. She was already planning for the hours of freedom when all the children would be "off her hands." That was the phrase used by Matthew and by Susan and by their friends, for the moment when the youngest child went off to school. "They'll be off your hands, darling Susan, and you'll have time to yourself." So said Matthew, the intelligent husband, who had often enough commended and consoled Susan, standing by her in spirit during the years when her soul was not her own, as she said, but her children's.

What it amounted to was that Susan saw herself as she had been at twenty-eight, unmarried; and then again somewhere about fifty, blossoming from the root of what she had been twenty years before. As if the essential Susan were in abeyance, as if she were in cold storage. Matthew said something like this to Susan one night: and she agreed that it was true—she did feel something like that. What, then, was this essential Susan? She did not know. Put like that it sounded ridiculous, and she did not really feel it. Anyway, they had a long discussion about the whole thing before going off to sleep in each other's arms.

So the twins went off to their school, two bright affectionate children who had no problems about it, since their older brother and sister had trodden this path so successfully before them. And now Susan was going to be alone in the big house, every day of the school term, except for the daily woman who came in to clean.

It was now, for the first time in this marriage, that something happened which neither of them had foreseen.

This is what happened. She returned, at nine-thirty, from taking the twins to the school by car, looking forward to seven blissful hours of freedom. On the first morning she was simply restless, worrying about the twins "naturally enough" since this was their first day away at school. She was hardly able to contain herself until they came back. Which they did happily, excited by the world of school, looking forward to the next day. And the next day Susan took them, dropped them, came back, and found herself reluctant to enter her big and beautiful home because it was as if something was waiting

for her there that she did not wish to confront. Sensibly, however, she parked the car in the garage, entered the house, spoke to Mrs Parkes the daily woman about her duties, and went up to her bedroom. She was possessed by a fever which drove her out again, downstairs, into the kitchen, where Mrs Parkes was making cake and did not need her, and into the garden. There she sat on a bench and tried to calm herself, looking at trees, at a brown glimpse of the river. But she was filled with tension, like a panic: as if an enemy was in the garden with her. She spoke to herself severely, thus: All this is quite natural. First, I spent twelve years of my adult life working, *living my own life*. Then I married, and from the moment I became pregnant for the first time I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. To the children. Not for one moment in twelve years have I been alone, had time to myself. So now I have to learn to be myself again. That's all.

And she went indoors to help Mrs Parkes cook and clean, and found some sewing to do for the children. She kept herself occupied every day. At the end of the first term she understood she felt two contrary emotions. First: secret astonishment and dismay that during those weeks when the house was empty of children she had in fact been more occupied (had been careful to keep herself occupied) than ever she had been when the children were around her needing her continual attention. Second: that now she knew the house would be full of them, and for five weeks, she resented the fact she would never be alone. She was already looking back at those hours of sewing, cooking (but by herself), as at a lost freedom which would not be hers for five long weeks. And the two months of term which would succeed the five weeks stretched alluringly open to her—freedom. But what freedom—when in fact she had been so careful *not* to be free of small duties during the last weeks? She looked at herself, Susan Rawlings, sitting in a big chair by the window in the bedroom, sewing shirts or dresses, which she might just as well have bought. She saw herself making cakes for hours at a time in the big family kitchen: yet usually she bought cakes. What she saw was a woman alone, that was true, but she had not felt alone. For

instance, Mrs Parkes was always somewhere in the house. And she did not like being in the garden at all, because of the closeness there of the enemy—irritation, restlessness, emptiness, whatever it was, which keeping her hands occupied made less dangerous for some reason.

Susan did not tell Matthew of these thoughts. They were not sensible. She did not recognize herself in them. What should she say to her dear friend and husband Matthew? "When I go into the garden, that is, if the children are not there, I feel as if there is an enemy there waiting to invade me." "What enemy, Susan darling?" "Well I don't know, really. . . ." "Perhaps you should see a doctor?"

No, clearly this conversation should not take place. The holidays began and Susan welcomed them. Four children, lively, energetic, intelligent, demanding: she was never, not for a moment of her day, alone. If she was in a room, they would be in the next room, or waiting for her to do something for them; or it would soon be time for lunch or tea, or to take one of them to the dentist. Something to do: five weeks of it, thank goodness.

On the fourth day of these so welcome holidays, she found she was storming with anger at the twins, two shrinking beautiful children who (and this is what checked her) stood hand in hand looking at her with sheer dismayed disbelief. This was their calm mother, shouting at them. And for what? They had come to her with some game, some bit of nonsense. They looked at each other, moved closer for support, and went off hand in hand, leaving Susan holding on to the windowsill of the living room, breathing deep, feeling sick. She went to lie down, telling the older children she had a headache. She heard the boy Harry telling the little ones: "It's all right, Mother's got a headache." She heard that *It's all right* with pain.

That night she said to her husband: "Today I shouted at the twins, quite unfairly." She sounded miserable, and he said gently: "Well, what of it?"

"It's more of an adjustment than I thought, their going to school."

"But Susie, Susie darling. . . ." For she was crouched weeping on the bed. He comforted her: "Susan, what is all this about? You shouted at them? What of it? If you shouted at them fifty times a day it wouldn't be more than the little devils deserve." But she wouldn't laugh. She wept. Soon he comforted her with his body. She became calm. Calm, she wondered what was wrong with her, and why she should mind so much that she might, just once, have behaved unjustly with the children. What did it matter? They had forgotten it all long ago: Mother had a headache and everything was all right.

It was a long time later that Susan understood that that night, when she had wept and Matthew had driven the misery out of her with his big solid body, was the last time, ever in their married life, that they had been—to use their mutual language—with each other. And even that was a lie, because she had not told him of her real fears at all.

The five weeks passed, and Susan was in control of herself, and good and kind, and she looked forward to the end of the holidays with a mixture of fear and longing. She did not know what to expect. She took the twins off to school (the elder children took themselves to school) and she returned to the house determined to face the enemy wherever he was, in the house, or the garden or—where?

She was again restless, she was possessed by restlessness. She cooked and sewed and worked as before, day after day, while Mrs Parkes remonstrated: "Mrs Rawlings, what's the need for it? I can do that, it's what you pay me for."

And it was so irrational that she checked herself. She would put the car into the garage, go up to her bedroom, and sit, hands in her lap, forcing herself to be quiet. She listened to Mrs Parkes moving around the house. She looked out into the garden and saw the branches shake the trees. She sat defeating the enemy, restlessness. Emptiness. She ought to be thinking about her life, about herself. But she did not. Or perhaps she could not. As soon as she forced her mind to think about Susan (for what else did she want to be alone for?) it skipped off to thoughts of butter or school clothes. Or it

thought of Mrs Parkes. She realised that she sat listening for the movements of the cleaning woman, following her every turn, bend, thought. She followed her in her mind from kitchen to bathroom, from table to oven, and it was as if the duster, the cleaning cloth, the saucepan, were in her own hand. She would hear herself saying: No, not like that, don't put that there. . . . Yet she did not give a damn what Mrs Parkes did, or if she did it at all. Yet she could not prevent herself from being conscious of her, every minute. Yes, this was what was wrong with her: she needed, when she was alone, to be really alone, with no one near. She could not endure the knowledge that in ten minutes or in half an hour Mrs Parkes would call up the stairs: "Mrs Rawlings, there's no silver polish. Madam, we're out of flour."

So she left the house and went to sit in the garden where she was screened from the house by trees. She waited for the demon to appear and claim her, but he did not.

She was keeping him off, because she had not, after all, come to an end of arranging herself.

She was planning how to be somewhere where Mrs Parkes would not come after her with a cup of tea, or a demand to be allowed to telephone (always irritating since Susan did not care who she telephoned or how often), or just a nice talk about something. Yes, she needed a place, or a state of affairs, where it would not be necessary to keep reminding herself: In ten minutes I must telephone Matthew about . . . and at half past three I must leave early for the children because the car needs cleaning. And at ten o'clock tomorrow I must remember. . . . She was possessed with resentment that the seven hours of freedom in every day (during weekdays in the school term) were not free, that never, not for one second, ever, was she free from the pressure of time, from having to remember this or that. She could never forget herself; never really let herself go into forgetfulness.

Resentment. It was poisoning her. (She looked at this emotion and thought it was absurd. Yet she felt it.) She was a prisoner. (She looked at this thought too, and it was no good telling herself it was a

ridiculous one.) She must tell Matthew—but what? She was filled with emotions that were utterly ridiculous, that she despised, yet that nevertheless she was feeling so strongly she could not shake them off.

The school holidays came round, and this time they were for nearly two months, and she behaved with a conscious controlled decency that nearly drove her crazy. She would lock herself in the bathroom, and sit on the edge of the bath, breathing deep, trying to let go into some kind of calm. Or she went up into the spare room, usually empty, where no one would expect her to be. She heard the children calling “Mother, Mother,” and kept silent, feeling guilty. Or she went to the very end of the garden, by herself, and looked at the slow-moving brown river; she looked at the river and closed her eyes and breathed slow and deep, taking it into her being, into her veins.

Then she returned to the family, wife and mother, smiling and responsible, feeling as if the pressure of these people—four lively children and her husband—were a painful pressure on the surface of her skin, a hand pressing on her brain. She did not once break down into irritation during these holidays, but it was like living out a prison sentence, and when the children went back to school, she sat on a white stone seat near the flowing river, and she thought: It is not even a year since the twins went to school, since *they were off my hands* (What on earth did I think I meant when I used that stupid phrase?) and yet I’m a different person. I’m simply not myself. I don’t understand it.

Yet she had to understand it. For she knew that this structure—big white house, on which the mortgage still cost four hundred a year, a husband, so good and kind and insightful, four children, all doing so nicely, and the garden where she sat, and Mrs Parkes the cleaning woman—all this depended on her, and yet she could not understand why, or even what it was she contributed to it.

She said to Matthew in their bedroom: “I think there must be something wrong with me.”

And he said: "Surely not, Susan? You look marvelous—you're as lovely as ever."

She looked at the handsome blond man, with his clear, intelligent, blue-eyed face, and thought: Why is it I can't tell him? Why not? And she said: "I need to be alone more than I am."

At which he swung his slow blue gaze at her, and she saw what she had been dreading: Incredulity. Disbelief. And fear. An incredulous blue stare from a stranger who was her husband, as close to her as her own breath.

He said: "But the children are at school and off your hands."

She said to herself: I've got to force myself to say: Yes, but do you realise that I never feel free? There's never a moment I can say to myself: There's nothing I have to remind myself about, nothing I have to do in half an hour, or an hour, or two hours. . . .

But she said: "I don't feel well."

He said: "Perhaps you need a holiday."

She said, appalled: "But not without you, surely?" For she could not imagine herself going off without him. Yet that was what he meant. Seeing her face, he laughed, and opened his arms, and she went into them, thinking: Yes, yes, but why can't I say it? And what is it I have to say?

She tried to tell him, about never being free. And he listened and said: "But Susan, what sort of freedom can you possibly want—short of being dead! Am I ever free? I go to the office, and I have to be there at ten—all right, half past ten, sometimes. And I have to do this or that, don't I? Then I've got to come home at a certain time—I don't mean it, you know I don't—but if I'm not going to be back home at six I telephone you. When can I ever say to myself: I have nothing to be responsible for in the next six hours?"

Susan, hearing this, was remorseful. Because it was true. The good marriage, the house, the children, depended just as much on his voluntary bondage as it did on hers. But why did he not feel bound? Why didn't he chafe and become restless? No, there was something really wrong with her and this proved it.

And that word *bondage*—why had she used it? She had never felt marriage, or the children, as bondage. Neither had he, or surely they wouldn't be together lying in each other's arms content after twelve years of marriage.

No, her state (whatever it was) was irrelevant, nothing to do with her real good life with her family. She had to accept the fact that after all, she was an irrational person and to live with it. Some people had to live with crippled arms, or stammers, or being deaf. She would have to live knowing she was subject to a state of mind she could not own.

Nevertheless, as a result of this conversation with her husband, there was a new regime next holidays.

The spare room at the top of the house now had a cardboard sign saying: PRIVATE! DO NOT DISTURB! on it. (This sign had been drawn in coloured chalks by the children, after a discussion between the parents in which it was decided this was psychologically the right thing.) The family and Mrs Parkes knew this was "Mother's Room" and that she was entitled to her privacy. Many serious conversations took place between Matthew and the children about not taking Mother for granted. Susan overheard the first, between father and Harry, the older boy, and was surprised at her irritation over it. Surely she could have a room somewhere in that big house and retire into it without such a fuss being made? Without it being so solemnly discussed? Why couldn't she simply have announced: "I'm going to fit out the little top room for myself, and when I'm in it I'm not to be disturbed for anything short of fire"? Just that, and finished; instead of long earnest discussions. When she heard Harry and Matthew explaining it to the twins with Mrs Parkes coming in—"Yes, well, a family sometimes gets on top of a woman"—she had to go right away to the bottom of the garden until the devils of exasperation had finished their dance in her blood.

But now there was a room, and she could go there when she liked, she used it seldom: she felt even more caged there than in her bedroom. One day she had gone up there after a lunch for ten children she had cooked and served because Mrs Parkes was not

there, and had sat alone for a while looking into the garden. She saw the children stream out from the kitchen and stand looking up at the window where she sat behind the curtains. They were all—her children and their friends—discussing Mother's Room. A few minutes later, the chase of children in some game came pounding up the stairs, but ended as abruptly as if they had fallen over a ravine, so sudden was the silence. They had remembered she was there, and had gone silent in a great gale of "Hush! Shhhhhh! Quiet, you'll disturb her. . . ." And they went tiptoeing downstairs like criminal conspirators. When she came down to make tea for them, they all apologised. The twins put their arms around her, from front and back, making a human cage of loving limbs, and promised it would never occur again. "We forgot, Mummy, we forgot all about it!"

What it amounted to was that Mother's Room, and her need for privacy, had become a valuable lesson in respect for other people's rights. Quite soon Susan was going up to the room only because it was a lesson it was a pity to drop. Then she took sewing up there, and the children and Mrs Parkes came in and out: it had become another family room.

She sighed, and smiled, and resigned herself—she made jokes at her own expense with Matthew over the room. That is, she did from the self she liked, she respected. But at the same time, something inside her howled with impatience, with rage. . . . And she was frightened. One day she found herself kneeling by her bed and praying: "Dear God, keep it away from me, keep him away from me." She meant the devil, for she now thought of it, not caring if she were irrational, as some sort of demon. She imagined him, or it, as a youngish man, or perhaps a middle-aged man pretending to be young. Or a man young-looking from immaturity? At any rate, she saw the young-looking face which, when she drew closer, had dry lines about mouth and eyes. He was thinnish, meagre in build. And he had a reddish complexion, and ginger hair. That was he—a gingery, energetic man, and he wore a reddish hairy jacket, unpleasant to the touch.

Well, one day she saw him. She was standing at the bottom of the garden, watching the river ebb past, when she raised her eyes and saw this person, or being, sitting on the white stone bench. He was looking at her, and grinning. In his hand was a long crooked stick, which he had picked off the ground, or broken off the tree above him. He was absent-mindedly, out of an absent-minded or freakish impulse of spite, using the stick to stir around in the coils of a blindworm or a grass snake (or some kind of snakelike creature: it was whitish and unhealthy to look at, unpleasant). The snake was twisting about, flinging its coils from side to side in a kind of dance of protest against the teasing prodding stick.

Susan looked at him thinking: Who is the stranger? What is he doing in our garden? Then she recognised the man around whom her terrors had crystallised. As she did so, he vanished. She made herself walk over to the bench. A shadow from a branch lay across thin emerald grass, moving jerkily over its roughness, and she could see why she had taken it for a snake, lashing and twisting. She went back to the house thinking: Right, then, so I've seen him with my own eyes, so I'm not crazy after all—there *is* a danger because I've seen him. He is lurking in the garden and sometimes even in the house, and he wants *to get into me and to take me over*.

She dreamed of having a room or a place, anywhere, where she could go and sit, by herself, no one knowing where she was.

Once, near Victoria, she found herself outside a news agent that had Rooms to Let advertised. She decided to rent a room, telling no one. Sometimes she could take the train in to Richmond and sit alone in it for an hour or two. Yet how could she? A room would cost three or four pounds a week, and she earned no money, and how could she explain to Matthew that she needed such a sum? What for? It did not occur to her that she was taking it for granted she wasn't going to tell him about the room.

Well, it was out of the question, having a room; yet she knew she must.

One day, when a school term was well established, and none of the children had measles or other ailments, and everything seemed

in order, she did the shopping early, explained to Mrs Parkes she was meeting an old school friend, took the train to Victoria, searched until she found a small quiet hotel, and asked for a room for the day. They did not let rooms by the day, the manageress said, looking doubtful, since Susan so obviously was not the kind of woman who needed a room for unrespectable reasons. Susan made a long explanation about not being well, being unable to shop without frequent rests for lying down. At last she was allowed to rent the room provided she paid a full night's price for it. She was taken up by the manageress and a maid, both concerned over the state of her health . . . which must be pretty bad if, living at Richmond (she had signed her name and address in the register), she needed a shelter at Victoria.

The room was ordinary and anonymous, and was just what Susan needed. She put a shilling in the gas fire, and sat, eyes shut, in a dingy armchair with her back to a dingy window. She was alone. She was alone. She could feel pressures lifting off her. First the sounds of traffic came very loud; then they seemed to vanish; she might even have slept a little. A knock on the door: it was Miss Townsend the manageress, bringing her a cup of tea with her own hands, so concerned was she over Susan's long silence and possible illness.

Miss Townsend was a lonely woman of fifty, running this hotel with all the rectitude expected of her, and she sensed in Susan the possibility of understanding companionship. She stayed to talk. Susan found herself in the middle of a fantastic story about her illness, which got more and more improbable as she tried to make it tally with the large house at Richmond, well-off husband, and four children. Suppose she said instead: Miss Townsend, I'm here in your hotel because I need to be alone for a few hours, above all *alone and with no one knowing where I am*. She said it mentally, and saw, mentally, the look that would inevitably come on Miss Townsend's elderly maiden's face. "Miss Townsend, my four children and my husband are driving me insane, do you understand that? Yes, I can see from the gleam of hysteria in your eyes that comes from

loneliness controlled but only just contained that I've got everything in the world you've ever longed for. Well, Miss Townsend, I don't want any of it. You can have it, Miss Townsend. I wish I was absolutely alone in the world, like you. Miss Townsend, I'm besieged by seven devils, Miss Townsend, Miss Townsend, let me stay here in your hotel where the devils can't get me. . . ." Instead of saying all this, she described her anaemia, agreed to try Miss Townsend's remedy for it, which was raw liver, minced, between whole-meal bread, and said yes, perhaps it would be better if she stayed at home and let a friend do shopping for her. She paid her bill and left the hotel, defeated.

At home Mrs Parkes said she didn't really like it, no, not really, when Mrs Rawlings was away from nine in the morning until five. The teacher had telephoned from school to say Joan's teeth were paining her, and she hadn't known what to say; and what was she to make for the children's tea, Mrs Rawlings hadn't said.

All this was nonsense, of course. Mrs Parkes's complaint was that Susan had withdrawn herself spiritually, leaving the burden of the big house on her.

Susan looked back at her day of "freedom" which had resulted in her becoming a friend to the lonely Miss Townsend, and in Mrs Parkes's remonstrances. Yet she remembered the short blissful hour of being alone, really alone. She was determined to arrange her life, no matter what it cost, so that she could have that solitude more often. An absolute solitude, where no one knew her or cared about her.

But how? She thought of saying to her old employer: I want you to back me up in a story with Matthew that I am doing part-time work for you. The truth is that . . . but she would have to tell him a lie too, and which lie? She could not say: I want to sit by myself three or four times a week in a rented room. And besides, he knew Matthew, and she could not really ask him to tell lies on her behalf, apart from his being bound to think it meant a lover.

Suppose she really took a part-time job, which she could get through fast and efficiently, leaving time for herself. What job?

Addressing envelopes? Canvassing?

And there was Mrs Parkes, working widow, who knew exactly what she was prepared to give to the house, who knew by instinct when her mistress withdrew in spirit from her responsibilities. Mrs Parkes was one of the servers of this world, but she needed someone to serve. She had to have Mrs Rawlings, her madam, at the top of the house or in the garden, so that she could come and get support from her: "Yes, the bread's not what it was when I was a girl. . . . Yes, Harry's got a wonderful appetite, I wonder where he puts it all. . . . Yes, it's lucky the twins are so much of a size, they can wear each other's shoes, that's a saving in these hard times. . . . Yes, the cherry jam from Switzerland is not a patch on the jam from Poland, and three times the price. . . ." And so on. That sort of talk Mrs Parkes must have, every day, or she would leave, not knowing herself why she left.

Susan Rawlings, thinking these thoughts, found that she was prowling through the great thicketed garden like a wild cat: she was walking up the stairs, down the stairs, through the rooms, into the garden, along the brown running river, back, up through the house, down again. . . . It was a wonder Mrs Parkes did not think it strange. But on the contrary, Mrs Rawlings could do what she liked, she could stand on her head if she wanted, provided she was *there*. Susan Rawlings prowled and muttered through her house, hating Mrs Parkes, hating poor Miss Townsend, dreaming of her hour of solitude in the dingy respectability of Miss Townsend's hotel bedroom, and she knew quite well she was mad. Yes, she was mad.

She said to Matthew that she must have a holiday. Matthew agreed with her. This was not as things had been once—how they had talked in each other's arms in the marriage bed. He had, she knew, diagnosed her finally as *unreasonable*. She had become someone outside himself that he had to manage. They were living side by side in this house like two tolerably friendly strangers.

Having told Mrs Parkes, or rather, asked for her permission, she went off on a walking holiday in Wales. She chose the remotest place she knew of. Every morning the children telephoned her before

they went off to school, to encourage and support her, just as they had over Mother's Room. Every evening she telephoned them, spoke to each child in turn, and then to Matthew. Mrs Parkes, given permission to telephone for instructions or advice, did so every day at lunchtime. When, as happened three times, Mrs Rawlings was out on the mountainside, Mrs Parkes asked that she should ring back at such and such a time, for she would not be happy in what she was doing without Mrs Rawlings' blessing.

Susan prowled over wild country with the telephone wire holding her to her duty like a leash. The next time she must telephone, or wait to be telephoned, nailed her to her cross. The mountains themselves seemed trammelled by her unfreedom. Everywhere on the mountains, where she met no one at all, from breakfast time to dusk, excepting sheep, or a shepherd, she came face to face with her own craziness which might attack her in the broadest valleys, so that they seemed too small; or on a mountaintop from which she could see a hundred other mountains and valleys, so that they seemed too low, too small, with the sky pressing down too close. She would stand gazing at a hillside brilliant with ferns and bracken, jeweled with running water, and see nothing but her devil, who lifted inhuman eyes at her from where he leaned negligently on a rock, switching at his ugly yellow boots with a leafy twig.

She returned to her home and family, with the Welsh emptiness at the back of her mind like a promise of freedom.

She told her husband she wanted to have an *au pair* girl.³

They were in their bedroom, it was late at night, the children slept. He sat, shirted and slippered, in a chair by the window, looking out. She sat brushing her hair and watching him in the mirror. A time-hallowed scene in the connubial bedroom. He said nothing, while she heard the arguments coming into his mind, only to be rejected because every one was *reasonable*.

"It seems strange to get one now, after all, the children are in school most of the day. Surely the time for you to have help was when you were stuck with them day and night. Why don't you ask Mrs Parkes to cook for you? She's even offered to—I can understand

if you are tired of cooking for six people. But you know that an *au pair* girl means all kinds of problems, it's not like having an ordinary char⁴ in during the day. . . ."

Finally he said carefully: "Are you thinking of going back to work?"

"No," she said, "no, not really," She made herself sound vague, rather stupid. She went on brushing her black hair and peering at herself so as to be oblivious of the short uneasy glances her Matthew kept giving her. "Do you think we can't afford it?" she went on vaguely, not at all the old efficient Susan who knew exactly what they could afford.

"It's not that," he said, looking out of the window at dark trees, so as not to look at her. Meanwhile she examined a round, candid, pleasant face with clear dark brows and clear grey eyes. A sensible face. She brushed thick healthy black hair and thought: Yet that's the reflection of a madwoman. How very strange! Much more to the point if what looked back at me was the gingery green-eyed demon with his dry meagre smile. . . . Why wasn't Matthew agreeing? After all, what else could he do? She was breaking her part of the bargain and there was no way of forcing her to keep it: that her spirit, her soul, should live in this house, so that the people in it could grow like plants in water, and Mrs Parkes remain content in their service. In return for this, he would be a good loving husband, and responsible towards the children. Well, nothing like this had been true of either of them for a long time. He did his duty, perfunctorily; she did not even pretend to do hers. And he had become like other husbands, with his real life in his work and the people he met there, and very likely a serious affair. All this was her fault.

At last he drew heavy curtains, blotting out the trees, and turned to force her attention: "Susan, are you really sure we need a girl?" But she would not meet his appeal at all: She was running the brush over her hair again and again, lifting fine black clouds in a small hiss of electricity. She was peering in and smiling as if she were amused at the clinging hissing hair that followed the brush.

"Yes, I think it would be a good idea on the whole," she said, with the cunning of a madwoman evading the real point.

In the mirror she could see her Matthew lying on his back, his hands behind his head, staring upwards, his face sad and hard. She felt her heart (the old heart of Susan Rawlings) soften and call out to him. But she set it to be indifferent.

He said: "Susan, the children?" It was an appeal that *almost* reached her. He opened his arms, lifting them from where they had lain by his sides, palms up, empty. She had only to run across and fling herself into them, onto his hard, warm chest, and melt into herself, into Susan. But she could not. She would not see his lifted arms. She said vaguely: "Well, surely it'll be even better for them? We'll get a French or a German girl and they'll learn the language."

In the dark she lay beside him, feeling frozen, a stranger. She felt as if Susan had been spirited away. She disliked very much this woman who lay here, cold and indifferent beside a suffering man, but she could not change her.

Next morning she set about getting a girl, and very soon came Sophie Traub from Hamburg, a girl of twenty, laughing, healthy, blue-eyed, intending to learn English. Indeed, she already spoke a good deal. In return for a room—"Mother's Room"—and her food, she undertook to do some light cooking, and to be with the children when Mrs Rawlings asked. She was an intelligent girl and understood perfectly what was needed. Susan said: "I go off sometimes, for the morning or for the day—well, sometimes the children run home from school, or they ring up, or a teacher rings up. I should be here, really. And there's the daily woman. . . ." And Sophie laughed her deep fruity *Fräulein's* laugh, showed her fine white teeth and her dimples, and said: "You want some person to play mistress of the house sometimes, not so?"

"Yes, that is just so," said Susan, a bit dry, despite herself, thinking in secret fear how easy it was, how much nearer to the end she was than she thought. Healthy *Fräulein* Traub's instant understanding of their position proved this to be true.

The *au pair* girl, because of her own common sense, or (as Susan said to herself with her new inward shudder) because she had been *chosen* so well by Susan, was a success with everyone, the children liking her, Mrs Parkes forgetting almost at once that she was German, and Matthew finding her "nice to have around the house." For he was now taking things as they came, from the surface of life, withdrawn both as a husband and a father from the household.

One day Susan saw how Sophie and Mrs Parkes were talking and laughing in the kitchen, and she announced that she would be away until teatime. She knew exactly where to go and what she must look for. She took the District Line to South Kensington, changed to the Circle, got off at Paddington, and walked around looking at the smaller hotels until she was satisfied with one which had FRED'S HOTEL painted on windowpanes that needed cleaning. The façade was a faded shiny yellow, like unhealthy skin. A door at the end of a passage said she must knock; she did, and Fred appeared. He was not at all attractive, not in any way, being fattish, and run-down, and wearing a tasteless striped suit. He had small sharp eyes in a white creased face, and was quite prepared to let Mrs Jones (she chose the farcical name deliberately, staring him out) have a room three days a week from ten until six. Provided of course that she paid in advance each time she came? Susan produced fifteen shillings (no price had been set by him) and held it out, still fixing him with a bold unblinking challenge she had not known until then she could use at will. Looking at her still, he took up a ten-shilling note from her palm between thumb and forefinger, fingered it; then shuffled up two half crowns, held out his own palm with these bits of money displayed thereon, and let his gaze lower broodingly at them. They were standing in the passage, a red-shaded light above, bare boards beneath, and a strong smell of floor polish rising about them. He shot his gaze up at her over the still-extended palm, and smiled as if to say: What do you take me for? "I shan't," said Susan, "be using this room for the purposes of making money." He still waited. She added another five shillings, at which he nodded and said: "You pay, and I ask no questions." "Good," said Susan. He now went past her

to the stairs, and there waited a moment: the light from the street door being in her eyes, she lost sight of him momentarily. Then she saw a sober-suited, white-faced, white-balding little man trotting up the stairs like a waiter, and she went after him. They proceeded in utter silence up the stairs of this house where no questions were asked—Fred's Hotel, which could afford the freedom for its visitors that poor Miss Townsend's hotel could not. The room was hideous. It had a single window, with thin green brocade curtains, a three-quarter bed that had a cheap green satin bedspread on it, a fireplace with a gas fire and a shilling meter by it, a chest of drawers, and a green wicker armchair.

"Thank you," said Susan, knowing that Fred (if this was Fred, and not George, or Herbert or Charlie) was looking at her not so much with curiosity, an emotion he would not own to, for professional reasons, but with a philosophical sense of what was appropriate. Having taken her money and shown her up and agreed to everything, he was clearly disapproving of her for coming here. She did not belong here at all, so his look said. (But she knew, already, how very much she did belong: the room had been waiting for her to join it.) "Would you have me called at five o'clock, please?" and he nodded and went downstairs.

It was twelve in the morning. She was free. She sat in the armchair, she simply sat, she closed her eyes and sat and let herself be alone. She was alone and no one knew where she was. When a knock came on the door she was annoyed, and prepared to show it: but it was Fred himself, it was five o'clock and he was calling her as ordered. He flicked his sharp little eyes over the room—bed, first. It was undisturbed. She might never have been in the room at all. She thanked him, said she would be returning the day after tomorrow, and left. She was back home in time to cook supper, to put the children to bed, to cook a second supper for her husband and herself later. And to welcome Sophie back from the pictures where she had gone with a friend. All these things she did cheerfully, willingly. But she was thinking all the time of the hotel room, she was longing for it with her whole being.

Three times a week. She arrived promptly at ten, looked Fred in the eyes, gave him twenty shillings, followed him up the stairs, went into the room, and shut the door on him with gentle firmness. For Fred, disapproving of her being here at all, was quite ready to let friendship, or at least acquaintanceship, follow his disapproval, if only she would let him. But he was content to go off on her dismissing nod, with the twenty shillings in his hand.

She sat in the armchair and shut her eyes.

What did she *do* in the room? Why, nothing at all. From the chair, when it had rested her, she went to the window, stretching her arms, smiling, treasuring her anonymity, to look out. She was no longer Susan Rawlings, mother of four, wife of Matthew, employer of Mrs Parkes and of Sophie Traub, with these and those relations with friends, schoolteachers, tradesmen. She no longer was mistress of the big white house and garden, owning clothes suitable for this and that activity or occasion. She was Mrs Jones, and she was alone, and she had no past and no future. Here I am, she thought, after all these years of being married and having children and playing those roles of responsibility—and I'm just the same. Yet there have been times I thought that nothing existed of me except the roles that went with being Mrs Matthew Rawlings. Yes, here I am, and if I never saw any of my family again, here I would still be . . . how very strange that is! And she leaned on the sill, and looked into the street, loving the men and women who passed, because she did not know them. She looked at the downtrodden buildings over the street, and at the sky, wet and dingy, or sometimes blue, and she felt she had never seen buildings or sky before. And then she went back to the chair, empty, her mind a blank. Sometimes she talked aloud, saying nothing—an exclamation, meaningless, followed by a comment about the floral pattern on the thin rug, or a stain on the green satin coverlet. For the most part, she wool-gathered—what word is there for it?—brooded, wandered, simply went dark, feeling emptiness run deliciously through her veins like the movement of her blood.

This room had become more her own than the house she lived in. One morning she found Fred taking her a flight higher than usual. She stopped, refusing to go up, and demanded her usual room, Number 19. "Well, you'll have to wait half an hour then," he said. Willingly she descended to the dark disinfectant-smelling hall, and sat waiting until the two, man and woman, came down the stairs, giving her swift indifferent glances before they hurried out into the street, separating at the door. She went up to the room, *her* room, which they had just vacated. It was no less hers, though the windows were set wide open, and a maid was straightening the bed as she came in.

After these days of solitude, it was both easy to play her part as mother and wife, and difficult—because it was so easy: she felt an impostor. She felt as if her shell moved here, with her family, answering to Mummy, Mother, Susan, Mrs Rawlings. She was surprised no one saw through her, that she wasn't turned out of doors, as a fake. On the contrary, it seemed the children loved her more; Matthew and she "got on" pleasantly, and Mrs Parkes was happy in her work under (for the most part, it must be confessed) Sophie Traub. At night she lay beside her husband, and they made love again, apparently just as they used to, when they were really married. But she, Susan, or the being who answered so readily and improbably to the name of Susan, was not there: she was in Fred's Hotel, in Paddington, waiting for the easing hours of solitude to begin.

Soon she made a new arrangement with Fred and with Sophie. It was for five days a week. As for the money, five pounds, she simply asked Matthew for it. She saw that she was not even frightened he might ask what for: he would give it to her, she knew that, and yet it was terrifying it could be so, for this close couple, these partners, had once known the destination of every shilling they must spend. He agreed to give her five pounds a week. She asked for just so much, not a penny more. He sounded indifferent about it. It was as if he were paying her, she thought: *paying her off*—yes, that was it. Terror came back for a moment, when she understood this, but she

stilled it: things had gone too far for that. Now, every week, on Sunday nights, he gave her five pounds, turning away from her before their eyes could meet on the transaction. As for Sophie Traub, she was to be somewhere in or near the house until six at night, after which she was free. She was not to cook, or to clean, she was simply to be there. So she gardened or sewed, and asked friends in, being a person who was bound to have a lot of friends. If the children were sick, she nursed them. If teachers telephoned, she answered them sensibly. For the five daytimes in the school week, she was altogether the mistress of the house.

One night in the bedroom, Matthew asked: "Susan, I don't want to interfere—don't think that, please—but are you sure you are well?"

She was brushing her hair at the mirror. She made two more strokes on either side of her head, before she replied: "Yes, dear, I am sure I am well."

He was again lying on his back, his big blond head on his hands, his elbows angled up and part-concealing his face. He said: "Then Susan, I have to ask you this question, though you must understand, I'm not putting any sort of pressure on you." (Susan heard the word pressure with dismay, because this was inevitable, of course she could not go on like this.) "Are things going to go on like this?"

"Well," she said, going vague and bright and idiotic again, so as to escape: "Well, I don't see why not."

He was jerking his elbows up and down, in annoyance or in pain, and, looking at him, she saw he had got thin, even gaunt; and restless angry movements were not what she remembered of him. He said: "Do you want a divorce, is that it?"

At this, Susan only with the greatest difficulty stopped herself from laughing: she could hear the bright bubbling laughter she *would* have emitted, had she let herself. He could only mean one thing: she had a lover, and that was why she spent her days in London, as lost to him as if she had vanished to another continent.

Then the small panic set in again: she understood that he hoped she did have a lover, he was begging her to say so, because otherwise it would be too terrifying.

She thought this out, as she brushed her hair, watching the fine black stuff fly up to make its little clouds of electricity, hiss, hiss, hiss. Behind her head, across the room, was a blue wall. She realised she was absorbed in watching the black hair making shapes against the blue. She should be answering him. "Do *you* want a divorce, Matthew?"

He said: "That surely isn't the point, is it?"

"You brought it up, I didn't," she said, brightly, suppressing meaningless tinkling laughter.

Next day she asked Fred: "Have enquiries been made for me?"

He hesitated, and she said: "I've been coming here a year now. I've made no trouble, and you've been paid every day. I have a right to be told."

"As a matter of fact, Mrs Jones, a man did come asking."

"A man from a detective agency?"

"Well, he could have been, couldn't he?"

"I was asking you . . . well, what did you tell him?"

"I told him a Mrs Jones came every weekday from ten until five or six and stayed in Number Nineteen by herself."

"Describing me?"

"Well Mrs Jones, I had no alternative. Put yourself in my place."

"By rights I should deduct what that man gave you for the information."

He raised shocked eyes: she was not the sort of person to make jokes like this! Then he chose to laugh: a pinkish wet slit appeared across his white crinkled face: his eyes positively begged her to laugh, otherwise he might lose some money. She remained grave, looking at him.

He stopped laughing and said: "You want to go up now?"—returning to the familiarity, the comradeship, of the country where

no questions are asked, on which (and he knew it) she depended completely.

She went up to sit in her wicker chair. But it was not the same. Her husband had searched her out. (The world had searched her out.) The pressures were on her. She was here with his connivance. He might walk in at any moment, here, into Room 19. She imagined the report from the detective agency: "A woman calling herself Mrs Jones, fitting the description of your wife (etc., etc., etc.), stays alone all day in room No. 19. She insists on this room, waits for it if it is engaged. As far as the proprietor knows she receives no visitors there, male or female." A report something on these lines, Matthew must have received.

Well of course he was right: things couldn't go on like this. He had put an end to it all simply by sending the detective after her.

She tried to shrink herself back into the shelter of the room, a snail pecked out of its shell and trying to squirm back. But the peace of the room had gone. She was trying consciously to revive it, trying to let go into the dark creative trance (or whatever it was) that she had found there. It was no use, yet she craved for it, she was as ill as a suddenly deprived addict.

Several times she returned to the room, to look for herself there, but instead she found the unnamed spirit of restlessness, a prickling fevered hunger for movement, an irritable self-consciousness that made her brain feel as if it had coloured lights going on and off inside it. Instead of the soft dark that had been the room's air, were now waiting for her demons that made her dash blindly about, muttering words of hate; she was impelling herself from point to point like a moth dashing itself against a windowpane, sliding to the bottom, fluttering off on broken wings, then crashing into the invisible barrier again. And again and again. Soon she was exhausted, and she told Fred that for a while she would not be needing the room, she was going on holiday. Home she went, to the big white house by the river. The middle of a weekday, and she felt guilty at returning to her own home when not expected. She stood unseen, looking in at the kitchen window. Mrs Parkes, wearing a

discarded floral overall of Susan's, was stooping to slide something into the oven. Sophie, arms folded, was leaning her back against a cupboard and laughing at some joke made by a girl not seen before by Susan—a dark foreign girl, Sophie's visitor. In an armchair Molly, one of the twins, lay curled, sucking her thumb and watching the grownups. She must have some sickness, to be kept from school. The child's listless face, the dark circles under her eyes, hurt Susan: Molly was looking at the three grownups working and talking in exactly the same way Susan looked at the four through the kitchen window: she was remote, shut off from them.

But then, just as Susan imagined herself going in, picking up the little girl, and sitting in an armchair with her, stroking her probably heated forehead, Sophie did just that: she had been standing on one leg, the other knee flexed, its foot set against the wall. Now she let her foot in its ribbon-tied red shoe slide down the wall, and stood solid on two feet, clapping her hands before and behind her, and sang a couple of lines in German, so that the child lifted her heavy eyes at her and began to smile. Then she walked, or rather skipped, over to the child, swung her up, and let her fall into her lap at the same moment she sat herself. She said "Hopla! Hopla! Molly . . ." and began stroking the dark untidy young head that Molly laid on her shoulder for comfort.

Well. . . . Susan blinked the tears of farewell out of her eyes, and went quietly up the house to her bedroom. There she sat looking at the river through the trees. She felt at peace, but in a way that was new to her. She had no desire to move, to talk, to do anything at all. The devils that had haunted the house, the garden, were not there; but she knew it was because her soul was in Room 19 in Fred's Hotel; she was not really here at all. It was a sensation that should have been frightening: to sit at her own bedroom window, listening to Sophie's rich young voice sing German nursery songs to her child, listening to Mrs Parkes clatter and move below, and to know that all this had nothing to do with her: she was already out of it.

Later, she made herself go down and say she was home: it was unfair to be here unannounced. She took lunch with Mrs Parkes,

Sophie, Sophie's Italian friend Maria, and her daughter Molly, and felt like a visitor.

A few days later, at bedtime, Matthew said: "Here's your five pounds," and pushed them over at her. Yet he must have known she had not been leaving the house at all.

She shook her head, gave it back to him, and said, in explanation, not in accusation: "As soon as you knew where I was, there was no point."

He nodded, not looking at her. He was turned away from her: thinking, she knew, how best to handle this wife who terrified him.

He said: "I wasn't trying to . . . it's just that I was worried."

"Yes, I know."

"I must confess that I was beginning to wonder . . ."

"You thought that I had a lover?"

"Yes, I am afraid I did."

She knew that he wished she had. She sat wondering how to say: "For a year now I've been spending all my days in a very sordid hotel room. It's the place where I'm happy. In fact, without it I don't exist." She heard herself saying this, and understood how terrified he was that she might. So instead she said: "Well, perhaps you're not far wrong."

Probably Matthew would think the hotel proprietor lied: he would want to think so.

"Well," he said, and she could hear his voice spring up, so to speak, with relief: "in that case I must confess I've got a bit of an affair on myself."

She said, detached and interested: "Really? Who is she?" and saw Matthew's startled look because of this reaction.

"It's Phil. Phil Hunt."

She had known Phil Hunt well in the old unmarried days. She was thinking: No, she won't do, she's too neurotic and difficult. She's never been happy yet. Sophie's much better: Well Matthew will see that himself, as sensible as he is.

This line of thought went on in silence, while she said aloud: "It's no point in telling you about mine, because you don't know him."

Quick, quick, invent, she thought. Remember how you invented all that nonsense for Miss Townsend.

She began slowly, careful not to contradict herself: "His name is Michael"—(*Michael What?*)—"Michael Plant." (What a silly name!) "He's rather like you—in looks, I mean." And indeed, she could imagine herself being touched by no one but Matthew himself. "He's a publisher." (Really? Why?) "He's got a wife already and two children."

She brought out this fantasy, proud of herself.

Matthew said: "Are you two thinking of marrying?"

She said, before she could stop herself: "Good God, *no!*"

She realised, if Matthew wanted to marry Phil Hunt, that this was too emphatic, but apparently it was all right, for his voice sounded relieved as he said: "It is a bit impossible to imagine oneself married to anyone else, isn't it?" With which he pulled her to him, so that her head lay on his shoulder. She turned her face into the dark of his flesh, and listened to the blood pounding through her ears saying: I am alone, I am alone, I am alone.

In the morning Susan lay in bed while he dressed.

He had been thinking things out in the night, because now he said: "Susan, why don't we make a foursome?"

Of course, she said to herself, of course he would be bound to say that. If one is sensible, if one is reasonable, if one never allows oneself a base thought or an envious emotion, naturally one says: Let's make a foursome!

"Why not?" she said.

"We could all meet for lunch. I mean, it's ridiculous, you sneaking off to filthy hotels, and me staying late at the office, and all the lies everyone has to tell."

What on earth did I say his name was?—she panicked, then said: "I think it's a good idea, but Michael is away at the moment. When he comes back though—and I'm sure you two would like each other."

"He's away, is he? So that's why you've been . . ." Her husband put his hand to the knot of his tie in a gesture of male coquetry she would not before have associated with him; and he bent to kiss her cheek with the expression that goes with the words: Oh you naughty little puss! And she felt its answering look, naughty and coy, come onto her face.

Inside she was dissolving in horror at them both, at how far they had both sunk from honesty of emotion.

So now she was saddled with a lover, and he had a mistress! How ordinary, how reassuring, how jolly! And now they would make a foursome of it, and go about to theatres and restaurants. After all, the Rawlings could well afford that sort of thing, and presumably the publisher Michael Plant could afford to do himself and his mistress quite well. No, there was nothing to stop the four of them developing the most intricate relationship of civilised tolerance, all enveloped in a charming afterglow of autumnal passion. Perhaps they would all go off on holidays together? She had known people who did. Or perhaps Matthew would draw the line there? Why should he, though, if he was capable of talking about "foursomes" at all?

She lay in the empty bedroom, listening to the car drive off with Matthew in it, off to work. Then she heard the children clattering off to school to the accompaniment of Sophie's cheerfully ringing voice. She slid down into the hollow of the bed, for shelter against her own irrelevance. And she stretched out her hand to the hollow where her husband's body had lain, but found no comfort there: he was not her husband. She curled herself up in a small tight ball under the clothes: she could stay here all day, all week, indeed, all her life.

But in a few days she must produce Michael Plant, and—but how? She must presumably find some agreeable man prepared to impersonate a publisher called Michael Plant. And in return for which she would—what? Well, for one thing they would make love. The idea made her want to cry with sheer exhaustion. Oh no, she had finished with all that—the proof of it was that the words "make love," or even imagining it, trying hard to revive no more than the

pleasures of sensuality, let alone affection, or love, made her want to run away and hide from the sheer effort of the thing. . . . Good Lord, why make love at all? Why make love with anyone? Or if you are going to make love, what does it matter who with? Why shouldn't she simply walk into the street, pick up a man and have a roaring sexual affair with him? Why not? Or even with Fred? What difference did it make?

But she had let herself in for it—an interminable stretch of time with a lover, called Michael, as part of a gallant civilised foursome. Well, she could not, and she would not.

She got up, dressed, went down to find Mrs Parkes, and asked her for the loan of a pound, since Matthew, she said, had forgotten to leave her money. She exchanged with Mrs Parkes variations on the theme that husbands are all the same, they don't think, and without saying a word to Sophie, whose voice could be heard upstairs from the telephone, walked to the underground, travelled to South Kensington, changed to the Inner Circle, got out at Paddington, and walked to Fred's Hotel. There she told Fred that she wasn't going on holiday after all, she needed the room. She would have to wait an hour, Fred said. She went to a busy tearoom-cum-restaurant around the corner, and sat watching the people flow in and out the door that kept swinging open and shut, watched them mingle and merge and separate, felt her being flow into them, into their movement. When the hour was up she left a half crown for her pot of tea, and left the place without looking back at it, just as she had left her house, the big, beautiful white house, without another look, but silently dedicating it to Sophie. She returned to Fred, received the key of No. 19, now free, and ascended the grimy stairs slowly, letting floor after floor fall away below her, keeping her eyes lifted, so that floor after floor descended jerkily to her level of vision, and fell away out of sight.

No. 19 was the same. She saw everything with an acute, narrow, checking glance: the cheap shine of the satin spread, which had been replaced carelessly after the two bodies had finished their convulsions under it; a trace of powder on the glass that topped the

chest of drawers; an intense green shade in a fold of the curtain. She stood at the window, looking down, watching people pass and pass and pass until her mind went dark from the constant movement. Then she sat in the wicker chair, letting herself go slack. But she had to be careful, because she did not want, today, to be surprised by Fred's knock at five o'clock.

The demons were not here. They had gone forever, because she was buying her freedom from them. She was slipping already into the dark fructifying dream that seemed to caress her inwardly, like the movement of her blood . . . but she had to think about Matthew first. Should she write a letter for the coroner? But what should she say? She would like to leave him with the look on his face she had seen this morning—banal, admittedly, but at least confidently healthy. Well, that was impossible, one did not look like that with a wife dead from suicide. But how to leave him believing she was dying because of a man—because of the fascinating publisher Michael Plant? Oh, how ridiculous! How absurd! How humiliating! But she decided not to trouble about it, simply not to think about the living. If he wanted to believe she had a lover, he would believe it. And he *did* want to believe it. Even when he had found out that there was no publisher in London called Michael Plant, he would think: Oh poor Susan, she was afraid to give me his real name.

And what did it matter whether he married Phil Hunt or Sophie? Though it ought to be Sophie, who was already the mother of those children . . . and what hypocrisy to sit here worrying about the children, when she was going to leave them because she had not got the energy to stay.

She had about four hours. She spent them delightfully, darkly, sweetly, letting herself slide gently, gently, to the edge of the river. Then, with hardly a break in her consciousness, she got up, pushed the thin rug against the door, made sure the windows were tight shut, put two shillings in the meter, and turned on the gas. For the first time since she had been in the room she lay on the hard bed that smelled stale, that smelled of sweat and sex.

She lay on her back on the green satin cover, but her legs were chilly. She got up, found a blanket folded in the bottom of the chest of drawers, and carefully covered her legs with it. She was quite content lying there, listening to the faint soft hiss of the gas that poured into the room, into her lungs, into her brain, as she drifted off into the dark river.

1963

Endnotes

- Note 1: Inn with large courtyard, in West Asia.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Household workers.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Live-in foreigner who serves a family in exchange for learning its language.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Charwoman—a woman hired to clean.[Return to reference 4](#)

PHILIP LARKIN

1922–1985

Philip Larkin was born in Coventry; was educated at its King Henry VIII School and at St. John's College, Oxford; and was for many years librarian of the Hull University Library. He wrote the poems of his first book, *The North Ship* (1945), under W. B. Yeats's strong enchantment. Although this influence persisted in the English poet's formal skill and subdued visionary longings, Larkin began to read Thomas Hardy seriously after World War II, and Hardy's rugged language, local settings, and ironic tone helped counter Yeats's influence. "After that," Larkin said, "Yeats came to seem so artificial—all that crap about masks and Crazy Jane and all the rest. It all rang so completely unreal." Also rejecting the international modernism of Eliot and Pound because of its mythical allusions, polyglot discourse, and fragmentary syntax, Larkin reclaimed a more direct, personal, formally regular model of poetry, supposedly rooted in a native English tradition of Wordsworth, Hardy, A. E. Housman, Wilfred Owen, and W. H. Auden. Even so, his poetry is not so thoroughly antimodernist as are his declarations: witness his imagist precision and alienated personae, his blending of revulsion and attraction toward modernity.

Larkin was the dominant figure in what came to be known as "the Movement," a group of university poets that included Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, and Thom Gunn, gathered together in Robert Conquest's landmark anthology of 1956, *New Lines*. Their work was

seen as counteracting not only the extravagances of modernism but also the influence of Dylan Thomas's high-flown, apocalyptic rhetoric: like Larkin, these poets preferred a civil grammar and rational syntax over prophecy, suburban realities over mythmaking.

No other poet presents the welfare-state world of postimperial Britain so vividly, so unsparingly, and so tenderly. "Poetry is an affair of sanity, of seeing things as they are," Larkin said; "I don't want to transcend the commonplace, I love the commonplace life. Everyday things are lovely to me." Eschewing the grandiose, he writes poetry that, in its everyday diction and melancholy wryness, worldly subjects and regular meters, affirms rather than contravenes the restrictions of ordinary life. Love's failure, the erosion of religious and national abutments, the loneliness of age and death—Larkin does not avert his poetic gaze from these bleak realities. As indicated by the title of his 1955 collection *The Less Deceived*, disillusionment, drabness, and resignation color these poems. Yet Larkin's drearily mundane world often gives way to muted promise, his speakers' alienation to possible communion, his skepticism to encounters even with the sublime. At the end of "High Windows," the characteristically ironic and self-deprecating speaker glimpses both radiant presence and total absence in the sunlit glass: "And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows / Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless."

Like Hardy, Larkin also wrote novels—*Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter* (1947)—and his poems have a novelist's sense of place and skill in the handling of direct speech. He also edited a controversial anthology, *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* (1973), which attempted to construct a modern native tradition in England. But his most significant legacy was his poetry, although his output was limited to four volumes. Out of "the commonplace life" he fashioned uncommon poems—some of the most emotionally complex, rhythmically polished, and intricately rhymed poems of the second half of the twentieth century.

Church Going

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
5 Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

10 Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new—
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses,¹ and pronounce
"Here endeth" much more loudly than I'd meant.
15 The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,²
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
20 Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate and pyx³ in locked cases,
25 And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come

To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples^o for a cancer; or on some
30 Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
35 Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
40 That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts⁴ were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?⁵
Or will he be my representative,
45
Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground⁶
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation—marriage, and birth,
50 And death, and thoughts of these—for which was
built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
55 In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,

60 And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

19541955

Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, Bible verses printed in large type for reading aloud.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An Irish sixpence has no value in England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Box in which Communion wafers are kept.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Galleries on top of carved screens separating the nave of a church from the choir.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Gum resin used in the making of incense; one of three presents given by the three wise men to the infant Jesus. "Gown-and-bands": gown and decorative collar worn by clergypeople.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Most Christian churches were built in the shape of a cross.[Return to reference 6](#)

Notes

- °: *medicinal herbs*[Return to reference °](#)

MCMXIV¹

Those long uneven lines
Standing as patiently
As if they were stretched outside
The Oval or Villa Park,²
5 The crowns of hats, the sun
On moustached archaic faces
Grinning as if it were all
An August Bank Holiday³ lark;

And the shut shops, the bleached,
10 Established names on the sunblinds,
The farthings and sovereigns,⁴
And dark-clothed children at play
Called after kings and queens,
The tin advertisements
15 For cocoa and twist,⁰ and the pubs
Wide open all day;

And the countryside not caring:
The place-names all hazed over
With flowering grasses, and fields
20 Shadowing Domesday lines⁵
Under wheat's restless silence;
The differently-dressed servants
With tiny rooms in huge houses,
The dust behind limousines;

25 Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word—the men

Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again.

19601964

Endnotes

- Note 1: 1914, in Roman numerals, as incised on stone memorials to the dead of World War I. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Respectively, London cricket ground and Birmingham football ground. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nationwide public holiday observed, when this poem was written (and in 1914), on the first Monday in August. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: At that time the least valuable and the most valuable British coins. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The still-visible boundaries of medieval farmers' long and narrow plots, ownership of which is recorded in William the Conqueror's *Domesday Book* (1085–86). [Return to reference 5](#)

Notes

- °: *tobacco* [Return to reference °](#)

Talking in Bed

Talking in bed ought to be easiest,
Lying together there goes back so far,
An emblem of two people being honest.

5 Yet more and more time passes silently.
Outside, the wind's incomplete unrest
Builds and disperses clouds about the sky,

And dark towns heap up on the horizon.
None of this cares for us. Nothing shows why
At this unique distance from isolation

10 It becomes still more difficult to find
Words at once true and kind,
Or not untrue and not unkind.

19601964

High Windows

When I see a couple of kids
And guess he's fucking her and she's
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
I know this is paradise

5 Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives—
Bonds and gestures pushed to one side
Like an outdated combine harvester,¹
And everyone young going down the long slide

10 To happiness, endlessly. I wonder if
Anyone looked at me, forty years back,
And thought, *That'll be the life;*
No God any more, or sweating in the dark

15 *About hell and that, or having to hide*
What you think of the priest. He
And his lot will all go down the long slide
Like free bloody birds. And immediately

Rather than words comes the thought of high
windows:

The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

20
19671974

Endnotes

- Note 1: Farm machine for harvesting grain. [Return to reference 1](#)

Going, Going¹

I thought it would last my time—
The sense that, beyond the town,
There would always be fields and farms,
Where the village louts² could climb
Such trees as were not cut down;
5 I knew there'd be false alarms

In the papers about old streets
And split-level shopping,³ but some
Have always been left so far;
And when the old part retreats
10 As the bleak high-risers come
We can always escape in the car.

Things are tougher than we are, just
As earth will always respond
However we mess it about;
15 Chuck filth in the sea, if you must:
The tides will be clean beyond.
—But what do I feel now? Doubt?

Or age, simply? The crowd
Is young in the Mi⁴ café;
20 Their kids are screaming for more—
More houses, more parking allowed,
More caravan⁵ sites, more pay.
On the Business Page, a score

25 Of spectacled grins approve
Some takeover bid that entails
Five per cent profit (and ten

Per cent more in the estuaries): move
Your works to the unspoilt dales⁶
(Grey area grants)!⁷ And when
30 You try to get near the sea
In summer . . .
It seems, just now,
To be happening so very fast;
Despite all the land left free
35 For the first time I feel somehow
That it isn't going to last,
That before I snuff it, the whole
Boiling⁸ will be bricked in
Except for the tourist parts—
40 First slum of Europe: a role
It won't be so hard to win,
With a cast of crooks and tarts.⁹
And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
45 The guildhalls,¹ the carved choirs.
There'll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres.
Most things are never meant.
This won't be, most likely: but greeds
50 And garbage are too thick-strewn
To be swept up now, or invent
Excuses that make them all needs.
I just think it will happen, soon.

19721974

Endnotes

- Note 1: After the auctioneer's cry, "Going, going, gone!" This poem was commissioned by the UK government to preface a report submitted to the 1972 UN Stockholm Conference on the Environment. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Uncouth or awkward person. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In old-fashioned shops, the store was on the ground floor, the owner's living quarters above. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The first inter-urban motorway in the UK. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A camper or travel trailer. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Valleys. "Works": factories. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Building areas are zoned, on English maps, by colors. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, the whole boiling mess. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Offensive slang for a promiscuous woman. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Town halls. [Return to reference 1](#)

Sad Steps¹

Groping back to bed after a piss
I part thick curtains, and am startled by
The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness.

5 Four o'clock: wedge-shadowed gardens lie
Under a cavernous, a wind-picked sky.
There's something laughable about this,

The way the moon dashes through clouds that blow
Loosely as cannon-smoke to stand apart
(Stone-coloured light sharpening the roofs below)

10 High and preposterous and separate—
Lozenge^o of love! Medallion of art!
O wolves of memory! Immensements! No,

One shivers slightly, looking up there.
The hardness and the brightness and the plain
15 Far-reaching singleness of that wide stare

Is a reminder of the strength and pain
Of being young; that it can't come again,
But is for others undiminished somewhere.

19681974

Endnotes

- Note 1: See Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* 31: "With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies." [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *diamondlike shape*[Return to reference](#) °

Homage to a Government

Next year we are to bring the soldiers home
For lack of money,¹ and it is all right.
Places they guarded, or kept orderly,
Must guard themselves, and keep themselves
orderly.
5 We want the money for ourselves at home
Instead of working. And this is all right.

It's hard to say who wanted it to happen,
But now it's been decided nobody minds.
The places are a long way off, not here,
Which is all right, and from what we hear
10 The soldiers there only made trouble happen.
Next year we shall be easier in our minds.

Next year we shall be living in a country
That brought its soldiers home for lack of money.
The statues will be standing in the same
15 Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same.
Our children will not know it's a different country.
All we can hope to leave them now is money.

Jan. 10, 19691974

Endnotes

- Note 1: In 1968 Harold Wilson's Labour government decided to withdraw troops east of the Suez Canal, mainly in the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia.[Return to reference 1](#)

The Explosion

On the day of the explosion
Shadows pointed towards the pithead:°
In the sun the slagheap° slept.

5 Down the lane came men in pitboots
Coughing oath-edged talk and pipe-smoke,
Shouldering off the freshened silence.

One chased after rabbits; lost them;
Came back with a nest of lark's eggs;
Showed them; lodged them in the grasses.

10 So they passed in beards and moleskins,¹
Fathers, brothers, nicknames, laughter,
Through the tall gates standing open.

15 At noon, there came a tremor; cows
Stopped chewing for a second; sun,
Scarfed as in a heat-haze, dimmed.

*The dead go on before us, they
Are sitting in God's house in comfort,
We shall see them face to face—*

20 Plain as lettering in the chapels
It was said, and for a second
Wives saw men of the explosion

Larger than in life they managed—
Gold as on a coin, or walking
Somehow from the sun towards them,

One showing the eggs unbroken.

19701974⁵

Endnotes

- Note 1: Clothes of heavy fabric. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *mine entrance* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *pile of scrap, refuse* [Return to reference °](#)

This Be The Verse¹

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

5 But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

10 Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.²
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.

Apr.? 19711974

Endnotes

- Note 1: See the elegy "Requiem," by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), of which the final verse reads, "This be the verse you grave for me: / *Here he lies where he longed to be, / Home is the sailor, home from sea, / And the hunter home from the hill.*"[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, continental shelf.[Return to reference 2](#)

Aubade¹

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
5 Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying, and being dead,
10 Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
—The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused—nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
15 But at the total emptiness for ever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.
20

This is a special way of being afraid
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade
Created to pretend we never die,
And specious stuff that says *No rational being*
25 *Can fear a thing it will not feel*, not seeing
That this is what we fear—no sight, no sound,
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
Nothing to love or link with,

30 The anaesthetic from which none come round.
 And so it stays just on the edge of vision,
 A small unfocused blur, a standing chill
 That slows each impulse down to indecision.
 Most things may never happen: this one will,
 And realisation of it rages out
 35 In furnace-fear when we are caught without
 People or drink. Courage is no good:
 It means not scaring others. Being brave
 Lets no one off the grave.
 Death is no different whined at than withstood.
 40
 Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
 It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
 Have always known, know that we can't escape,
 Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
 Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
 45 In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
 Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
 The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
 Work has to be done.
 Postmen like doctors go from house to house.
 50
 19771977

Endnotes

- Note 1: Music or poem announcing dawn. [Return to reference 1](#)

A. K. RAMANUJAN

1929–1993

Born in Mysore, India, Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan grew up amid the different languages that later informed his life's work as poet, translator, and linguist: he spoke Kannada in the streets, Tamil with his mother, and English with his father, a mathematics professor at Mysore University. Educated there and at Deccan College, he traveled for graduate studies to Indiana University, staying on in the United States to teach at the University of Chicago from 1961. He was the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, and in 1976 the Indian government honored him with the Padma Shri for distinguished service to the nation.

Ramanujan affirmed that "cultural traditions in India are indissolubly plural and often conflicting," and his poetry—in its texture and subject matter—embodies this complex intercultural mingling within India and across much of the contemporary world. His poems reflect the influence of modern English-language poets, such as W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens, while also drawing on the vivid and structural use of metaphor, the flowing imagery and syntax, the spare diction and paradoxes of ancient and medieval poetry of south India. A poem such as the wittily entitled "Elements of Composition" recalls a traditional Indian vision of identity as embedded in endlessly fluid, concentrically arranged contexts at the same time that it suggests a postmodern vision of the self as decentered, composite, and

provisional. "India does not have one past," Ramanujan emphasized, "but many pasts," and the same is true of the self whose multiple pasts he composes and decomposes in his poetry.

Self-Portrait

I resemble everyone
but myself, and sometimes see
in shop-windows,
despite the well-known laws
of optics,
5 the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown,
often signed in a corner
by my father.

1966

Elements of Composition

Composed as I am, like others,
of elements on certain well-known lists,
father's seed and mother's egg

5 gathering earth, air, fire, mostly
water, into a mulberry mass,
moulding calcium,

carbon, even gold, magnesium and such,
into a chattering self tangled
in love and work,

10 scary dreams, capable of eyes that can see,
only by moving constantly,
the constancy of things

like Stonehenge or cherry trees;

add uncle's eleven fingers
15 making shadow-plays of rajas^o
and cats, hissing,

becoming fingers again, the look
of panic on sister's face
an hour before

20 her wedding, a dated newspaper map
of a place one has never seen, maybe
no longer there

after the riots, downtown Nairobi,¹
that a friend carried in his passport

25 as others would
a woman's picture in their wallets;
add the lepers of Madurai,⁰
male, female, married,
with children,
30 lion faces, crabs for claws,
clotted on their shadows
under the stone-eyed
goddesses of dance, mere pillars,
moving as nothing on earth
can move—
35 I pass through them
as they pass through me
taking and leaving
affections, seeds, skeletons,
40 millennia of fossil records
of insects that do not last
a day,
body-prints of mayflies,
a legend half-heard
45 in a train
of the half-man searching
for an ever-fleeing
other half²
through Muharram tigers,³
50 hyacinths in crocodile waters,
and the sweet

twisted lives of epileptic saints,
and even as I add,
I lose, decompose
55 into my elements,
into other names and forms,
past, and passing, tenses
without time,
caterpillar on a leaf, eating,
60 being eaten.⁴

1986

Endnotes

- Note 1: Capital of Kenya; in the rioting that ensued after a coup in 1978, many Asian-owned shops were looted and burned. (South Asians formed much of Nairobi's merchant class during and after the era of British colonial rule.)[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In an essay Ramanujan compares the Hindu myth of the god that "splits himself into male and female" to "the androgynous figure in Plato's *Symposium*, halved into male and female segments which forever seek each other and crave union."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: During the first month of the Islamic calendar, Muharram processions, often including dancers in tiger masks, commemorate the martyrdom of Muhammad's grandson, Husein.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: According to a poem in the ancient Sanskrit *Taittiriya Upanishad*, "What eats is eaten, / and what's eaten, eats / in turn" (Ramanujan's translation, in his essay "Some Thoughts on 'Non-Western' Classics").[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *Indian kings or princes*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *city in south India*[Return to reference](#) °

THOM GUNN

1929–2004

The son of a London journalist, Thomson Gunn was educated at University College School, London, then Trinity College, Cambridge, and Stanford University, where he studied under the antimodernist, classically inclined poet Yvor Winters. In a poem addressed to Winters, he wrote: "You keep both Rule and Energy in view, / Much power in each, most in the balanced two." The poems of Gunn's *Fighting Terms* (1954) and *The Sense of Movement* (1957) aimed for the same balance. They were influenced by the seventeenth-century English poet John Donne and the twentieth-century French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and introduced a modern Metaphysical poet able to give powerfully concrete expression to abstract ideas. Along with Philip Larkin, he was seen as a member of "the Movement"—English poets who preferred inherited verse forms to either modernist avant-gardism or high-flown Romanticism. In the second half of *My Sad Captains* (1961), he began to move away from the will-driven heroes and the tight-fitting stanzas of his early work into more tentative explorations of experience and more supple syllabic or open verse forms. "Most of my poems are ambivalent," he said. Moving from England to San Francisco, he experimented with LSD and moved also from poems presumably addressed to women to poems frankly homosexual. *The Man with Night Sweats* (1992) ends with a sequence of poems remarkable for their unflinching directness, compassion, and grace about the deaths of friends from

AIDS. Gunn was a poet of rare intelligence and power in all his protean changes.

Black Jackets

In the silence that prolongs the span
Rawly of music when the record ends,
The red-haired boy who drove a van
In weekday overalls but, like his friends,

5 Wore cycle boots and jacket here
To suit the Sunday hangout he was in,
 Heard, as he stretched back from his beer,
Leather creak softly round his neck and chin.

 Before him, on a coal-black sleeve
10 Remote exertion had lined, scratched, and burned
 Insignia that could not revive
The heroic fall or climb where they were earned.

 On the other drinkers bent together,
Concocting selves for their impervious kit,
15 He saw it as no more than leather
Which, taut across the shoulders grown to it,

 Sent through the dimness of a bar
As sudden and anonymous hints of light
 As those that shipping give, that are
20 Now flickers in the Bay, now lost in night.

 He stretched out like a cat, and rolled
The bitterish taste of beer upon his tongue,
 And listened to a joke being told:
The present was the things he stayed among.

25 If it was only loss he wore,
He wore it to assert, with fierce devotion,

Complicity and nothing more.
He recollected his initiation,

30 And one especially of the rites.
For on his shoulders they had put tattoos:
The group's name on the left, The Knights,
And on the right the slogan Born To Lose.

1961

My Sad Captains

One by one they appear in
the darkness: a few friends, and
a few with historical
names. How late they start to shine!
5 but before they fade they stand
perfectly embodied, all

the past lapping them like a
cloak of chaos. They were men
who, I thought, lived only to
10 renew the wasteful force they
spent with each hot convulsion.
They remind me, distant now.

True, they are not at rest yet,
but now that they are indeed
15 apart, winnowed from failures,
they withdraw to an orbit
and turn with disinterested
hard energy, like the stars.

1961

From the Wave

It mounts at sea, a concave wall
Down-ribbed with shine,
And pushes forward, building tall
Its steep incline.

5 Then from their hiding rise to sight
Black shapes on boards
Bearing before the fringe of white
It mottles towards.

10 Their pale feet curl, they poise their weight
With a learn'd skill.
It is the wave they imitate
Keeps them so still.

15 The marbling bodies have become
Half wave, half men,
Grafted it seems by feet of foam
Some seconds, then,

20 Late as they can, they slice the face
In timed procession:
Balance is triumph in this place,
Triumph possession.

The mindless heave of which they rode
A fluid shelf
Breaks as they leave it, falls and, slowed,
Loses itself.

25 Clear, the sheathed bodies slick as seals
Loosen and tingle;

And by the board the bare foot feels
The suck of shingle.

30 They paddle in the shallows still;
Two splash each other;
Then all swim out to wait until
The right waves gather.

1971

Still Life

I shall not soon forget
The greyish-yellow skin
To which the face had set:
Lids tight: nothing of his,
No tremor from within,
5 Played on the surfaces.

He still found breath, and yet
It was an obscure knack.
I shall not soon forget
The angle of his head,
10 Arrested and reared back
On the crisp field of bed,

Back from what he could neither
Accept, as one opposed,
Nor, as a life-long breather,
15 Consentingly let go,
The tube his mouth enclosed
In an astonished O.

The Missing

Now as I watch the progress of the plague,
The friends surrounding me fall sick, grow thin,
And drop away. Bared, is my shape less vague
—Sharply exposed and with a sculpted skin?

5 I do not like the statue's chill contour,
Not nowadays. The warmth investing me
Led outward through mind, limb, feeling, and more
In an involved increasing family.

10 Contact of friend led to another friend,
Supple entwinement through the living mass
Which for all that I knew might have no end,
Image of an unlimited embrace.

15 I did not just feel ease, though comfortable:
Aggressive as in some ideal of sport,
With ceaseless movement thrilling through the
whole,
Their push kept me as firm as their support.

20 But death—Their deaths have left me less defined:
It was their pulsing presence made me clear.
I borrowed from it, I was unconfined,
Who tonight balance unsupported here,

Eyes glaring from raw marble, in a pose
Languorously part-buried in the block,
Shins perfect and no calves, as if I froze
Between potential and a finished work.

—Abandoned incomplete, shape of a shape,

25

In which exact detail shows the more strange,
Trapped in unwholeness, I find no escape
Back to the play of constant give and change.

Aug. 19871992

Notes

- °: *AIDS*[Return to reference °](#)

DEREK WALCOTT

1930—2017

Derek Walcott was born on the island of Saint Lucia in the British West Indies, where he had a Methodist upbringing in a largely Roman Catholic society. He was educated at St. Mary's College in Saint Lucia and the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. He then moved to Trinidad, where he worked as a book reviewer, art critic, playwright, and artistic director of a theater workshop. From the early 1980s on he also taught at a number of American colleges and universities, especially Boston University; in 1992 he received the Nobel Prize in Literature.

As a Black poet writing from within both the English literary tradition and the history of a colonized people, Walcott self-mockingly referred to his split allegiances to his African Caribbean and his European inheritances as those of a "schizophrenic," a "mongrel," a "mulatto of style." His background was indeed racially and culturally mixed: his grandmothers were of African descent; his grandfathers were White, a Dutchman and an Englishman. Schooled in the Standard English that is the official language of Saint Lucia, Walcott also grew up speaking the predominantly French Creole (or patois) that is the primary language of everyday life (the island had traded hands fourteen times in colonial wars between the British and the French). In his poetry this cross-cultural inheritance is sometimes the source of pain and ambivalence, as when in "A Far Cry from Africa" he refers to himself as being "poisoned with the

blood of both.” At other times it fuels a celebratory integration of multiple forms, visions, and energies, as in parts of his long poem *Omeros*, which transposes elements of Homeric epic from the Aegean to the Caribbean.

Even as a schoolboy Walcott knew he was not alone in his effort to sort through his vexed postcolonial affiliations. From a young age he felt a special affinity with Irish writers such as W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and J. M. Synge, whom he saw as fellow colonials—“They were the niggers of Britain”—with the same paradoxical hatred for the British Empire and worship of the English language. He repeatedly asked how the postcolonial poet can both grieve the agonizing harm of British colonialism and appreciate the empire’s literary gift. Walcott also acknowledged other English and American writers—T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Hart Crane, W. H. Auden, and Robert Lowell—as enabling influences.

Over the course of his prolific career, Walcott adapted various European literary archetypes (for example, the Greek character Philoctetes) and forms (epic, quatrains, terza rima, English meters). He ascribed his rigorous concern with craft to his youthful Protestantism. At once disciplined and flamboyant as a poet, he insisted on the specifically Caribbean opulence of his art: “I come from a place that likes grandeur; it likes large gestures; it is not inhibited by flourish; it is a rhetorical society; it is a society of physical performance; it is a society of style.” Although much of his poetry is in a rhetorically elevated Standard English, Walcott adapted the calypso rhythms of a lightly creolized English in “The Schooner *Flight*,” and he braided together West Indian English, Standard English, and French patois in *Omeros*. He had a great passion for metaphor, by which he deftly wove imaginative connections across cultural and racial boundaries. His plays, written in an accurate and energetic language, are similarly infused with the spirit of syncretism, vividly conjoining Caribbean and European motifs, images, and idioms.

A Far Cry from Africa

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu,¹ quick as flies,
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.²
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
5 "Waste no compassion on these separate dead!"
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy.
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?
10
Threshed out by beaters,³ the long rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries
Have wheeled since civilization's dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.
The violence of beast on beast is read
15 As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread
20 Of the white peace contracted by the dead.
Again brutish necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,⁴
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
25 I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

1956, 1962

Endnotes

- Note 1: An East African ethnic group whose members, as Mau Mau fighters, conducted an eight-year campaign of violent resistance against British colonial settlers in Kenya in the 1950s.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Open country, neither cultivated nor forest (Afrikaans).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In big-game hunting, Natives are hired to beat the brush, driving birds—such as ibises—and other animals into the open.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Spanish Civil War (1936–39).[Return to reference 4](#)

From The Schooner *Flight*

1 Adios, Carenage¹

In idle August, while the sea soft,
and leaves of brown islands stick to the rim
of this Caribbean, I blow out the light
by the dreamless face of Maria Concepcion
to ship as a seaman on the schooner *Flight*.
5 Out in the yard turning grey in the dawn,
I stood like a stone and nothing else move
but the cold sea rippling like galvanize
and the nail holes of stars in the sky roof,
till a wind start to interfere with the trees.
10 I pass me dry neighbour sweeping she yard
as I went downhill, and I nearly said:
"Sweep soft, you witch, 'cause she don't sleep hard,"
but the bitch look through me like I was dead.
A route taxi pull up, park-lights still on.
15 The driver size up my bags with a grin:
"This time, Shabine, like you really gone!"
I ain't answer the ass, I simply pile in
the back seat and watch the sky burn
above Laventille² pink as the gown
20 in which the woman I left was sleeping,
and I look in the rearview and see a man
exactly like me, and the man was weeping
for the houses, the streets, the whole fucking island.

25 Christ have mercy on all sleeping things!
From that dog rotting down Wrightson Road
to when I was a dog on these streets;

if loving these islands must be my load,
out of corruption my soul takes wings,
But they had started to poison my soul
30 with their big house, big car, big-time bohbohl,³
coolie, nigger, Syrian, and French Creole,
so I leave it for them and their carnival—
I taking a sea-bath, I gone down the road.
I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,⁴
35 a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes
that they nickname Shabine, the patois^o for
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw
when these slums of empire was paradise.
I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
40 I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

But Maria Concepcion was all my thought
watching the sea heaving up and down
45 as the port side of dories, schooners, and yachts
was painted afresh by the strokes of the sun
signing her name with every reflection;
I knew when dark-haired evening put on
her bright silk at sunset, and, folding the sea,
50 sidled under the sheet with her starry laugh,
that there'd be no rest, there'd be no forgetting.
Is like telling mourners round the graveside
about resurrection, they want the dead back,
so I smile to myself as the bow rope untied
55 and the *Flight* swing seaward: "Is no use repeating
that the sea have more fish. I ain't want her
dressed in the sexless light of a seraph,^o
I want those round brown eyes like a marmoset,⁵
and
till the day when I can lean back and laugh,

60 those claws that tickled my back on sweating
Sunday afternoons, like a crab on wet sand.”
As I worked, watching the rotting waves come
past the bow that scissor the sea like silk,
65 I swear to you all, by my mother’s milk,
by the stars that shall fly from tonight’s furnace,
that I loved them, my children, my wife, my home;
I loved them as poets love the poetry
that kills them, as drowned sailors the sea.

70 You ever look up from some lonely beach
and see a far schooner? Well, when I write
this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt;
I go draw and knot every line as tight
as ropes in this rigging; in simple speech
75 my common language go be the wind,
my pages the sails of the schooner *Flight*.

1979

Endnotes

- Note 1: Waterfront where schooners are cleaned and repaired. “Adios”: good-bye (Spanish). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Hillside slum outside Port of Spain, Trinidad. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Or *bobol*: corrupt practices or fraud, organized by people in positions of power (eastern Caribbean English). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Capital of the Bahamas. “Monos”: island off the northwest coast of Trinidad. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: South American monkey. [Return to reference 5](#)

Notes

- °: *spoken dialect*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *angel*[Return to reference °](#)

The Season of Phantasmal Peace

Then all the nations of birds lifted together
the huge net of the shadows of this earth
in multitudinous dialects, twittering tongues,
stitching and crossing it. They lifted up
5 the shadows of long pines down trackless slopes,
the shadows of glass-faced towers down evening
streets,
the shadow of a frail plant on a city sill—
the net rising soundless as night, the birds' cries
soundless, until
there was no longer dusk, or season, decline, or
weather,
10 only this passage of phantasmal light
that not the narrowest shadow dared to sever.

And men could not see, looking up, what the wild
geese drew,
what the ospreys trailed behind them in silvery ropes
that flashed in the icy sunlight; they could not hear
15 battalions of starlings waging peaceful cries,
bearing the net higher, covering this world
like the vines of an orchard, or a mother drawing
the trembling gauze over the trembling eyes
of a child fluttering to sleep;

it was the light
20 that you will see at evening on the side of a hill
in yellow October, and no one hearing knew
what change had brought into the raven's cawing,
the killdeer's screech, the ember-circling chough—
such an immense, soundless, and high concern
for the fields and cities where the birds belong,

25 except it was their seasonal passing, Love,
 made seasonless, or, from the high privilege of their
 birth,
 something brighter than pity for the wingless ones
 below them who shared dark holes in windows and
 in houses,
30 and higher they lifted the net with soundless voices
 above all change, betrayals of falling suns,
 and this season lasted one moment, like the pause
 between dusk and darkness, between fury and
 peace,
 but, for such as our earth is now, it lasted long.

1981

Notes

- °: *bird in crow family*[Return to reference °](#)

FROM OMEROS^{[1](#)}

Endnotes

- Note 1: Modern Greek version of the name Homer. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are, along with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, from which Walcott adapts the terza rima stanza, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), major influences on this Caribbean epic, which moves across centuries and geographies, from Saint Lucia to Africa to Ireland. [Return to reference 1](#)

Book One

Chapter III

III

"Mais qui ça qui rivait-ous, Philoctete?"²

"Moin

blessé."³

"But what is wrong wif you, Philoctete?"

"I am blest

wif this wound, Ma Kilman⁴ *qui pas ka guérir pièce.*

Which will never heal."

"Well, you must take it easy.

Go home and lie down, give the foot a lickle^o

5

rest."

Philoctete, his trouser-legs rolled, stares out to sea

from the worn rumshop window. The itch in the sore
tingles like the tendrils of the anemone,
and the puffed blister of Portuguese man-o'-war.^o

10

He believed the swelling came from the chained
ankles

of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure?
That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's

but that of his race, for a village black and poor
as the pigs that rooted in its burning garbage,
then were hooked on the anchors of the abattoir.^o

15

Ma Kilman was sewing. She looked up and saw his
face

squinting from the white of the street. He was
waiting

to pass out on the table. This went on for days.

20 The ice turned to warm water near the self-hating
 gesture of clenching his head tight in both hands.
 She
 heard the boys in blue uniforms, going to school,
 screaming at his elbow: "Pheeloh! Pheelosophee!"
 A mummy embalmed in Vaseline and alcohol.
 In the Egyptian silence she muttered softly:

 25 "It have a flower somewhere, a medicine, and ways
 my grandmother would boil it. I used to watch ants
 climbing her white flower-pot. But, God, in which
 place?"

 Where was this root? What senna,^o what tepid
 tisanes,^o
 could clean the branched river of his corrupted
 blood,
 30 whose sap was a wounded cedar's? What did it
 mean,

 this name that felt like a fever? Well, one good heft
 of his garden-cutlass would slice the damned name
 clean
 from its rotting yam. He said, "*Merci.*"^o Then he left.

Endnotes

- Note 2:
 Pronounced *fee-lock-TET*; a name shared with Philoctetes, who, in the *Iliad* and Sophocles' eponymous play, is abandoned on an island on the way to the Trojan War after receiving a snakebite. The wound never heals and continually torments Philoctetes, who moans uncontrollably. Later the gods decide that the war cannot be won without him, and the Greek soldiers have to go back to the island and beg him to return with them to battle.

[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: French patois, punningly mistranslated below, since *blessé* actually means “wounded.” [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The owner of the No Pain Café, Ma Kilman serves in the poem as a sibyl (female prophet) and an obeah woman (one practicing a kind of West Indian sorcery). [Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *little (West Indian English)* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *jellyfish* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slaughterhouse* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicinal herb* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *medicinal beverages* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *Thank you (French)* [Return to reference °](#)

Book Six

Chapter XLIX

I

She bathed him in the brew of the root.¹ The basin was one of those cauldrons from the old sugar-mill, with its charred pillars, rock pasture, and one grazing

horse, looking like helmets that have tumbled downhill

5 from an infantry charge. Children rang them with stones.

Wildflowers sprung in them when the dirt found a seam.

She had one in her back yard, close to the crotons,^o agape in its crusted, agonized O: the scream of centuries. She scraped its rusted scabs, she scoured

10 the mouth of the cauldron, then fed a crackling pyre with palms and banana-trash. In the scream she poured

tin after kerosene tin, its base black from fire,

of seawater and sulphur. Into this she then fed the bubbling root and leaves. She led Philoctete to the gurgling lava. Trembling, he entered

15 his bath like a boy. The lime leaves leeches to his wet

knuckled spine like islands that cling to the basin of the rusted Caribbean. An icy sweat

glazed his scalp, but he could feel the putrescent
shin
20 drain in the seethe like sucked marrow, he felt it
drag
the slime from his shame. She rammed him back to
his place

as he tried climbing out with: "*Not yet!*" With a rag
sogged in a basin of ice she rubbed his squeezed
face
the way boys enjoy their mother's ritual rage,

25 and as he surrendered to her, the foul flower
on his shin whitened and puckered, the corolla
closed its thorns like the sea-egg. What else did it
cure?

II

The bow leapt back to the palm of the warrior.
The yoke of the wrong name lifted from his
shoulders.
30 His muscles loosened like those of a brown river
that was dammed with silt, and then silken its
boulders
with refreshing strength. His ribs thudded like a
horse
cantering on a beach that bursts into full gallop

while a boy yanks at its rein with terrified "Whoas!"
35 The white foam unlocked his coffles, his ribbed
shallop
broke from its anchor, and the water, which he
swirled

like a child, steered his brow into the right current,
as calm as *In God We Troust*² to that other world,
and his flexed palm enclosed an oar with the identi-

40 ical closure of a mouth around its own name,
the way a sea-anemone closes slyly
into a secrecy many mistake for shame.

Centuries weigh down the head of the swamp-lily,
its tribal burden arches the sea-almond's^o spine,
45 in barracoon³ back yards the soul-smoke still passes,

but the wound has found her own cure. The soft
days spin
the spittle of the spider in webbed glasses,
as she drenches the burning trash to its last flame,
and the embers steam and hiss to the schoolboys'
cries
50 when he'd weep in the window for their tribal
shame.

A shame for the loss of words, and a language tired
of accepting that loss, and then all accepted.
That was why the sea stank from the frothing urine
of surf, and fish-guts reeked from the government
shed,

55 and why God pissed on the village for months of
rain.

But now, quite clearly the tears trickled down his
face
like rainwater down a cracked carafe from Choiseul,⁴

as he stood like a boy in his bath with the first clay's
innocent prick! So she threw Adam a towel.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Ma Kilman is bathing Philoctete to heal his wound.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Near the poem's beginning, the character Achille chisels this misspelled phrase into his canoe and then decides, "Leave it! Is God' spelling and mine" (1.1.2).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Barracks for housing convicts or enslaved people.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A village in Saint Lucia.[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *tree or shrub*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *a tree*[Return to reference °](#)

TED HUGHES

1930–1998

Ted Hughes was born in Yorkshire, the son of one of seventeen men from a regiment of several hundred to return from the battle of Gallipoli in World War I, a tragedy that imprinted the imagination of the poet. He was educated at Mexborough Grammar School and Pembroke College, Cambridge, where in his last year he changed his course of study from English to archaeology and anthropology, pursuing his interest in the mythic structures that were later to inform his poetry. In 1956 he married the American-born poet Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963. As poets they explored the world of raw feeling and sensation, a world that Hughes's poems tended to view through the eye of the predator, Plath's through the eye of the victim.

In contrast to the rational lucidity and buttoned-up forms of Philip Larkin and other English poets of "the Movement," Hughes fashions a mythical consciousness in his poems, embodied in violent metaphors, blunt syntax, harsh alliterative clusters, bunched stresses, incantatory repetitions, insistent assonances, and a dark brooding tone. His early books, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960), show the influence of D. H. Lawrence's *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), and Hughes's electrifying descriptions of jaguars, thrushes, and pike similarly generate metaphors that relate such creatures to forces underlying all animal and human experience. With *Crow* (1970) and *Gaudete* (1977) he abandoned at

once the semblance of realism and the traditional metrical patterning of his early work, in the belief that “the very sound of metre calls up the ghosts of the past and it is difficult to sing one’s own tune against that choir. It is easier to speak a language that raises no ghosts.” Returning from the wilder shores of myth, Hughes showed in *Moortown* (1979), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *River* (1983), and *Flowers and Insects* (1989) that he could render the natural world with a delicacy and tenderness as arresting as his earlier ferocity. In *Tales from Ovid* (1997) he brilliantly re-created—rather than translated—twenty-four passages from the Roman poet Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In the poems of his last volume, *Birthday Letters* (1998), all but two of which are addressed to Plath, Hughes broke a silence of thirty-five years to lift the curtain on the tragic drama of their marriage. That same year he was appointed a member of the Order of Merit, having served as poet laureate of the United Kingdom since 1984. His *Collected Poems* was published in 2003.

Wind

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming
hills,
Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

5 Till day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous and emerald,
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye.

10 At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as
The coal-house door. I dared once to look up—
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my
eyes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its
guyrope,¹

15 The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap:
The wind flung a magpie away and a black-
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

20 Rang like some fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,

Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

1957

Endnotes

- Note 1: Rope or cable that extends from a tent or pole and anchors it to the ground.[Return to reference 1](#)

Pike

Pike, three inches long, perfect
Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold.
Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin.
They dance on the surface among the flies.

5 Or move, stunned by their own grandeur,
Over a bed of emerald, silhouette
Of submarine delicacy and horror.
A hundred feet long in their world.

In ponds, under the heat-struck lily pads—
Gloom of their stillness:
10 Logged on last year's black leaves, watching
upwards.
Or hung in an amber cavern of weeds

The jaws' hooked clamp and fangs
Not to be changed at this date;
A life subdued to its instrument;
15 The gills kneading quietly, and the pectorals.

Three we kept behind glass,
Jungled in weed: three inches, four,
And four and a half: fed fry to them—
20 Suddenly there were two. Finally one

With a sag belly and the grin it was born with.
And indeed they spare nobody.
Two, six pounds each, over two feet long,
High and dry and dead in the willow-herb—

One jammed past its gills down the other's gullet:

25 The outside eye stared: as a vice locks—
The same iron in this eye
Though its film shrank in death.

30 A pond I fished, fifty yards across,
Whose lilies and muscular tench¹
Had outlasted every visible stone
Of the monastery that planted them—

35 Stilled legendary depth:
It was as deep as England. It held
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old
That past nightfall I dared not cast

40 But silently cast and fished
With the hair frozen on my head
For what might move, for what eye might move.
The still splashes on the dark pond,

 Owls hushing the floating woods
Frail on my ear against the dream
Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,
That rose slowly towards me, watching.

1959, 1960

Endnotes

- Note 1: Variety of freshwater fish. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *young fish* [Return to reference °](#)

Out

1 The Dream Time

My father sat in his chair recovering
From the four-year mastication^o by gunfire and mud,
Body buffeted wordless, estranged by long soaking
In the colors of mutilation.

His outer perforations
5 Were valiantly healed, but he and the hearth-fire, its
blood-flicker
On biscuit-bowl and piano and table leg,
Moved into strong and stronger possession
Of minute after minute, as the clock's tiny cog
Labored and on the thread of his listening
10 Dragged him bodily from under
The mortised^o four-year strata of dead Englishmen
He belonged with. He felt his limbs clearing
With every slight, gingerish movement. While I,
small and four,
Lay on the carpet as his luckless double,
His memory's buried, immovable anchor,
15 Among jawbones and blown-off boots, tree-stumps,
shell-cases and craters,
Under rain that goes on drumming its rods and
thickening
Its kingdom, which the sun has abandoned, and
where nobody
Can ever again move from shelter.

20 The dead man in his cave beginning to sweat;
The melting bronze visor of flesh
Of the mother in the baby-furnace—

Nobody believes, it
Could be nothing, all
Undergo smiling at
25 The lulling of blood in
Their ears, their ears, their ears, their eyes
Are only drops of water and even the dead man
suddenly
Sits up and sneezes—Atishoo!
Then the nurse wraps him up, smiling,
30 And, though faintly, the mother is smiling,
And it's just another baby.

As after being blasted to bits
The reassembled infantryman
Tentatively totters out, gazing around with the eyes
35 Of an exhausted clerk.

3 Remembrance Day¹

The poppy is a wound, the poppy is the mouth
Of the grave, maybe of the womb searching—

A canvas-beauty puppet on a wire
40 Today whoring everywhere. It is years since I wore
one.

It is more years
The shrapnel that shattered my father's paybook

Gripped me, and all his dead
Gripped him to a time

45 He no more than they could outgrow, but, cast into
 one, like iron,
 Hung deeper than refreshing of ploughs

 In the woe-dark under my mother's eye—
 One anchor

 Holding my juvenile neck bowed to the dunkings of
 the Atlantic.

50 So goodbye to that bloody-minded flower.

 You dead bury your dead.
 Goodbye to the cenotaphs^o on my mother's breasts.

 Goodbye to all the remaindered charms of my
 father's survival.
 Let England close. Let the green sea-anemone close.

1967

Endnotes

- Note 1: Holiday (November 11) commemorating soldiers who lost their lives in battle. The practice of wearing red poppies in honor of lost soldiers recalls John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields" (1915), which depicts the flowers growing between the graves on a battlefield.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *grinding; chewing*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *firmly fixed*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *empty tombs*[Return to reference °](#)

Theology

No, the serpent did not
Seduce Eve to the apple.
All that's simply
Corruption of the facts.

5 Adam ate the apple.
Eve ate Adam.
The serpent ate Eve.
This is the dark intestine.

10 The serpent, meanwhile,
Sleeps his meal off in Paradise—
Smiling to hear
God's querulous calling.

1967

Crow's Last Stand

Burning
 burning
 burning¹
 there was finally
 something
5 The sun could not burn, that it had rendered
 Everything down to—a final obstacle
 Against which it raged and charred

And rages and chars

Limpid^o among the glaring furnace clinkers^o
10 The pulsing blue tongues and the red and the yellow
 The green lickings of the conflagration

Limpid and black—

Crow's eye-pupil, in the tower of its scorched fort.
1970

Endnotes

- Note 1: See "Burning burning burning burning," line 308 of T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, where it is quoted from the Buddha's Fire Sermon. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *clear* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *coal remains* [Return to reference °](#)

Crow Tyrannosaurus

Creation quaked voices—
It was a cortege¹
Of mourning and lament
Crow could hear and he looked around fearfully.

5 The swift's body fled past
Pulsating
With insects
And their anguish, all it had eaten.

10 The cat's body writhed
Gagging
A tunnel
Of incoming death-struggles, sorrow on sorrow.

And the dog was a bulging filterbag
Of all the deaths it had gulped for the flesh and the
bones.
15 It could not digest their screeching finales.
Its shapeless cry was a blort² of all those voices.

Even man he was a walking
Abattoir³
Of innocents—
20 His brain incinerating their outcry.

Crow thought 'Alas
Alas ought I .
To stop eating
And try to become the light?'

25 But his eye saw a grub. And his head, trapsprung,
stabbed.
And he listened
And he heard
Weeping

30 Grubs grubs He stabbed he stabbed
Weeping
Weeping .

Weeping he walked and stabbed

Thus came the eye's
roundness
the ear's
deafness.

1970

Endnotes

- Note 1: A procession, especially for a funeral.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A neologism (made-up word) that accentuates shapelessness.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Slaughterhouse.[Return to reference 3](#)

ALICE MUNRO

(1931–2024)

Alice Munro was one of the leading short-story writers of her generation. Her fiction combines sparseness and realism—an uncompromising look at a panorama of faltering lives—with magisterial vision and expansiveness. Munro’s signature approach to the short story, in which she uses a deceptively simple style to produce complex, layered, and emotionally potent effects, has influenced many of her English-language contemporaries, both within and outside Canada. In addition to one novel, *Lives of Girls and Women* (1972), she published numerous collections of short stories, including *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), *Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), *Friend of My Youth* (1990), *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998), *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001), *Runaway* (2004), *Carried Away* (2006), *The View from Castle Rock* (2006), *Too Much Happiness* (2009), and *Dear Life* (2012). She won the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013.

Many of Munro’s stories are written in the first person, often from the perspective of women whose voices and experiences suggest the author’s history. She was born Alice Anne Laidlaw to a low-income family in Wingham, Ontario, and her parents’ struggles with a variety of rural occupations continued throughout her childhood. She began writing in her teens and in 1949 enrolled in the University of Western

Ontario; she left the university two years later to marry and raise three daughters. She typically set her stories in small towns where poverty stamps itself on all facets of life, and where women confront—often in a spirit that combines resignation with stubborn resistance—the triple binds of economic, gender, and cultural confinement. Through a precise and particular emphasis on setting and character, Munro evokes rural Canadian life in the decades following midcentury, when modernity and the promise of the future are often crowded out by a hardening sense of the past.

In an early writing, Munro describes an approach to the outside world that effectively captures her sense of the mystery within the ordinary—the hallmark of her realist style: “It seems as if there are feelings that have to be translated into a next-door language, which might blow them up and burst them altogether; or else they have to be let alone. The truth about them is always suspected, never verified, the light catches but doesn’t define them. . . . Yet there is the feeling—I have the feeling—that at some level these things open; fragments, moments, suggestions, open, full of power.” This aura of openness and suggestion, conveyed through “next-door language,” gives Munro’s stories their haunting aspect, their quality of movement, rippling and widening from the small-scale to the magnificent. The story included here, “Walker Brothers Cowboy,” exemplifies her ability to imbue “fragments, moments, suggestions” with fullness and power, as we view through a young girl’s eyes both the pathos and the degradation of men and women whose lives have fallen into a potentially deadening cycle of promise and decay.

Walker Brothers Cowboy¹

After supper my father says, "Want to go down and see if the Lake's still there?" We leave my mother sewing under the dining-room light, making clothes for me against² the opening of school. She has ripped up for this purpose an old suit and an old plaid wool dress of hers, and she has to cut and match very cleverly and also make me stand and turn for endless fittings, sweaty, itching from the hot wool, ungrateful. We leave my brother in bed in the little screened porch at the end of the front veranda, and sometimes he kneels on his bed and presses his face against the screen and calls mournfully, "Bring me an ice-cream cone!" but I call back, "You will be asleep," and do not even turn my head.

Then my father and I walk gradually down a long, shabby sort of street, with Silverwoods Ice Cream signs standing on the sidewalk, outside tiny, lighted stores. This is in Tuppertown, an old town on Lake Huron,³ an old grain port. The street is shaded, in some places, by maple trees whose roots have cracked and heaved the sidewalk and spread out like crocodiles into the bare yards. People are sitting out, men in shirtsleeves and undershirts and women in aprons—not people we know but if anybody looks ready to nod and say, "Warm night," my father will nod too and say something the same. Children are still playing. I don't know them either because my mother keeps my brother and me in our own yard, saying he is too young to leave it and I have to mind him. I am not so sad to watch their evening games because the games themselves are ragged, dissolving. Children, of their own will, draw apart, separate into islands of two or one under the heavy trees, occupying themselves in such solitary ways as I do all day, planting pebbles in the dirt or writing in it with a stick.

Presently we leave these yards and houses behind; we pass a factory with boarded-up windows, a lumberyard whose high wooden

gates are locked for the night. Then the town falls away in a defeated jumble of sheds and small junkyards, the sidewalk gives up and we are walking on a sandy path with burdocks, plantains, humble nameless weeds all around. We enter a vacant lot, a kind of park really, for it is kept clear of junk and there is one bench with a slat missing on the back, a place to sit and look at the water. Which is generally gray in the evening, under a lightly overcast sky, no sunsets, the horizon dim. A very quiet, washing noise on the stones of the beach. Further along, towards the main part of town, there is a stretch of sand, a water slide, floats bobbing around the safe swimming area, a lifeguard's rickety throne. Also a long dark-green building, like a roofed veranda, called the Pavilion, full of farmers and their wives, in stiff good clothes, on Sundays. That is the part of the town we used to know when we lived at Dungannon and came here three or four times a summer, to the Lake. That, and the docks where we would go and look at the grain boats, ancient, rusty, wallowing, making us wonder how they got past the breakwater let alone to Fort William.

Tramps hang around the docks and occasionally on these evenings wander up the dwindling beach and climb the shifting, precarious path boys have made, hanging on to dry bushes, and say something to my father which, being frightened of tramps, I am too alarmed to catch. My father says he is a bit hard up himself. "I'll roll you a cigarette if it's any use to you," he says, and he shakes tobacco out carefully on one of the thin butterfly papers, flicks it with his tongue, seals it and hands it to the tramp, who takes it and walks away. My father also rolls and lights and smokes one cigarette of his own.

He tells me how the Great Lakes came to be. All where Lake Huron is now, he says, used to be flat land, a wide flat plain. Then came the ice, creeping down from the North, pushing deep into the low places. Like *that*—and he shows me his hand with his spread fingers pressing the rock-hard ground where we are sitting. His fingers make hardly any impression at all and he says, "Well, the old ice cap had a lot more power behind it than this hand has." And then

the ice went back, shrank back towards the North Pole where it came from, and left its fingers of ice in the deep places it had gouged, and ice turned to lakes and there they were today. They were *new*, as time went. I try to see that plain before me, dinosaurs walking on it, but I am not able even to imagine the shore of the Lake when the Indians were there, before Tuppertown. The tiny share we have of time appalls me, though my father seems to regard it with tranquillity. Even my father, who sometimes seems to me to have been at home in the world as long as it has lasted, has really lived on this earth only a little longer than I have, in terms of all the time there has been to live in. He has not known a time, any more than I, when automobiles and electric lights did not at least exist. He was not alive when this century started. I will be barely alive—old, old—when it ends. I do not like to think of it. I wish the Lake to be always just a lake, with the safe-swimming floats marking it, and the breakwater and the lights of Tuppertown.

My father has a job, selling for Walker Brothers. This is a firm that sells almost entirely in the country, the back country. Sunshine, Boylesbridge, Turnaround—that is all his territory. Not Dungannon where we used to live, Dungannon is too near town and my mother is grateful for that. He sells cough medicine, iron tonic, corn plasters, laxatives, pills for female disorders, mouthwash, shampoo, liniment, salves, lemon and orange and raspberry concentrate for making refreshing drinks, vanilla, food coloring, black and green tea, ginger, cloves, and other spices, rat poison. He has a song about it, with these two lines:

And have all liniments and oils,
For everything from corns to boils. . . .

Not a very funny song, in my mother's opinion. A peddler's song, and that is what he is, a peddler knocking at backwoods kitchens. Up until last winter we had our own business, a fox farm. My father raised silver foxes and sold their pelts to the people who make them into capes and coats and muffs. Prices fell, my father hung on

hoping they would get better next year, and they fell again, and he hung on one more year and one more and finally it was not possible to hang on anymore, we owed everything to the feed company. I have heard my mother explain this, several times, to Mrs. Oliphant, who is the only neighbor she talks to. (Mrs. Oliphant also has come down in the world, being a schoolteacher who married the janitor.) We poured all we had into it, my mother says, and we came out with nothing. Many people could say the same thing, these days, but my mother has no time for the national calamity, only ours. Fate has flung us onto a street of poor people (it does not matter that we were poor before; that was a different sort of poverty), and the only way to take this, as she sees it, is with dignity, with bitterness, with no reconciliation. No bathroom with a claw-footed tub and a flush toilet is going to comfort her, nor water on tap and sidewalks past the house and milk in bottles, not even the two movie theatres and the Venus Restaurant and Woolworths so marvellous it has live birds singing in its fan-cooled corners and fish as tiny as fingernails, as bright as moons, swimming in its green tanks. My mother does not care.

In the afternoons she often walks to Simon's Grocery and takes me with her to help carry things. She wears a good dress, navy blue with little flowers, sheer, worn over a navy-blue slip. Also a summer hat of white straw, pushed down on the side of the head, and white shoes I have just whitened on a newspaper on the back steps. I have my hair freshly done in long damp curls which the dry air will fortunately soon loosen, a stiff large hair ribbon on top of my head. This is entirely different from going out after supper with my father. We have not walked past two houses before I feel we have become objects of universal ridicule. Even the dirty words chalked on the sidewalk are laughing at us. My mother does not seem to notice. She walks serenely like a lady shopping, like a *lady* shopping, past the housewives in loose beltless dresses torn under the arms. With me her creation, wretched curls and flaunting hair bow, scrubbed knees and white socks—all I do not want to be. I loathe even my name when she says it in public, in a voice so high, proud, and

ringing, deliberately different from the voice of any other mother on the street.

My mother will sometimes carry home, for a treat, a brick of ice cream—pale Neapolitan; and because we have no refrigerator in our house we wake my brother and eat it at once in the dining room, always darkened by the wall of the house next door. I spoon it up tenderly, leaving the chocolate till last, hoping to have some still to eat when my brother's dish is empty. My mother tries then to imitate the conversations we used to have at Dungannon, going back to our earliest, most leisurely days before my brother was born, when she would give me a little tea and a lot of milk in a cup like hers and we would sit out on the step facing the pump, the lilac tree, the fox pens beyond. She is not able to keep from mentioning those days. "Do you remember when we put you in your sled and Major pulled you?" (Major our dog, that we had to leave with neighbors when we moved.) "Do you remember your sandbox outside the kitchen window?" I pretend to remember far less than I do, wary of being trapped into sympathy or any unwanted emotion.

My mother has headaches. She often has to lie down. She lies on my brother's narrow bed in the little screened porch, shaded by heavy branches. "I look up at that tree and I think I am at home," she says.

"What you need," my father tells her, "is some fresh air and a drive in the country." He means for her to go with him, on his Walker Brothers route.

That is not my mother's idea of a drive in the country.

"Can I come?"

"Your mother might want you for trying on clothes."

"I'm beyond sewing this afternoon," my mother says.

"I'll take her then. Take both of them, give you a rest."

What is there about us that people need to be given a rest from? Never mind. I am glad enough to find my brother and make him go to the toilet and get us both into the car, our knees unscrubbed, my hair unringleted. My father brings from the house his two heavy brown suitcases, full of bottles, and sets them on the back seat. He

wears a white shirt, brilliant in the sunlight, a tie, light trousers belonging to his summer suit (his other suit is black, for funerals, and belonged to my uncle before he died), and a creamy straw hat. His salesman's outfit, with pencils clipped in the shirt pocket. He goes back once again, probably to say goodbye to my mother, to ask her if she is sure she doesn't want to come, and hear her say, "No. No thanks, I'm better just to lie here with my eyes closed." Then we are backing out of the driveway with the rising hope of adventure, just the little hope that takes you over the bump into the street, the hot air starting to move, turning into a breeze, the houses growing less and less familiar as we follow the shortcut my father knows, the quick way out of town. Yet what is there waiting for us all afternoon but hot hours in stricken farmyards, perhaps a stop at a country store and three ice-cream cones or bottles of pop, and my father singing? The one he made up about himself has a title—"The Walker Brothers Cowboy"—and it starts out like this:

Old Ned Fields, he now is dead,
So I am ridin' the route instead. . . .

Who is Ned Fields? The man he has replaced, surely, and if so he really is dead; yet my father's voice is mournful-jolly, making his death some kind of nonsense, a comic calamity. "Wisht I was back on the Rio Grande,⁴ plungin' through the dusky sand." My father sings most of the time while driving the car. Even now, heading out of town, crossing the bridge and taking the sharp turn onto the highway, he is humming something, mumbling a bit of a song to himself, just tuning up, really, getting ready to improvise, for out along the highway we pass the Baptist Camp, the Vacation Bible Camp, and he lets loose:

Where are the Baptists, where are the Baptists,
where are all the Baptists today?
They're down in the water, in Lake Huron water,
with their sins all a-gittin' washed away.

My brother takes this for straight truth and gets up on his knees trying to see down to the Lake. "I don't see any Baptists," he says accusingly. "Neither do I, son," says my father. "I told you, they're down in the Lake."

No roads paved when we left the highway. We have to roll up the windows because of dust. The land is flat, scorched, empty. Bush lots at the back of the farms hold shade, black pine-shade like pools nobody can ever get to. We bump up a long lane and at the end of it what could look more unwelcoming, more deserted than the tall unpainted farmhouse with grass growing uncut right up to the front door, green blinds down, and a door upstairs opening on nothing but air? Many houses have this door, and I have never yet been able to find out why. I ask my father and he says they are for walking in your sleep. *What?* Well, if you happen to be walking in your sleep and you want to step outside. I am offended, seeing too late that he is joking, as usual, but my brother says sturdily, "If they did that they would break their necks."

The 1930s. How much this kind of farmhouse, this kind of afternoon seem to me to belong to that one decade in time, just as my father's hat does, his bright flared tie, our car with its wide running board (an Essex, and long past its prime). Cars somewhat like it, many older, none dustier, sit in the farmyards. Some are past running and have their doors pulled off, their seats removed for use on porches. No living things to be seen, chickens or cattle. Except dogs. There are dogs lying in any kind of shade they can find, dreaming, their lean sides rising and sinking rapidly. They get up when my father opens the car door, he has to speak to them. "Nice boy, there's a boy, nice old boy." They quiet down, go back to their shade. He should know how to quiet animals, he has held desperate foxes with tongs around their necks. One gentling voice for the dogs and another, rousing, cheerful, for calling at doors. "Hello there, missus, it's the Walker Brothers man and what are you out of today?" A door opens, he disappears. Forbidden to follow, forbidden even to leave the car, we can just wait and wonder what he says. Sometimes trying to make my mother laugh, he pretends to be

himself in a farm kitchen, spreading out his sample case. "Now then, missus, are you troubled with parasitic life? Your children's scalps, I mean. All those crawly little things we're too polite to mention that show up on the heads of the best of families? Soap alone is useless, kerosene is not too nice a perfume, but I have here—" Or else, "Believe me, sitting and driving all day the way I do I *know* the value of these fine pills. Natural relief. A problem common to old folks too, once their days of activity are over—How about you, Grandma?" He would wave the imaginary box of pills under my mother's nose and she would laugh finally, unwillingly. "He doesn't say that really, does he?" I said, and she said no of course not, he was too much of a gentleman.

One yard after another, then, the old cars, the pumps, dogs, views of gray barns and falling-down sheds and unturning windmills. The men, if they are working in the fields, are not in any fields that we can see. The children are far away, following dry creek beds or looking for blackberries, or else they are hidden in the house, spying at us through cracks in the blinds. The car seat has grown slick with our sweat. I dare my brother to sound the horn, wanting to do it myself but not wanting to get the blame. He knows better. We play I Spy, but it is hard to find many colors. Gray for the barns and sheds and toilets and houses, brown for the yard and fields, black or brown for the dogs. The rusting cars show rainbow patches, in which I strain to pick out purple or green; likewise I peer at doors for shreds of old peeling paint, maroon or yellow. We can't play with letters, which would be better, because my brother is too young to spell. The game disintegrates anyway. He claims my colors are not fair, and wants extra turns.

In one house no door opens, though the car is in the yard. My father knocks and whistles, calls, "Hullo there! Walker Brothers man!" but there is not a stir of reply anywhere. This house has no porch, just a bare, slanting slab of cement on which my father stands. He turns around, searching the barnyard, the barn whose mow must be empty because you can see the sky through it, and finally he bends to pick up his suitcases. Just then a window is

opened upstairs, a white pot appears on the sill, is tilted over and its contents splash down the outside wall. The window is not directly above my father's head, so only a stray splash would catch him. He picks up his suitcases with no particular hurry and walks, no longer whistling, to the car. "Do you know what that was?" I say to my brother. "Pee." He laughs and laughs.

My father rolls and lights a cigarette before he starts the car. The window has been slammed down, the blind drawn, we never did see a hand or face. "Pee, pee," sings my brother ecstatically. "Somebody dumped down pee!" "Just don't tell your mother that," my father says. "She isn't liable to see the joke." "Is it in your song?" my brother wants to know. My father says no but he will see what he can do to work it in.

I notice in a little while that we are not turning in any more lanes, though it does not seem to me that we are headed home. "Is this the way to Sunshine?" I ask my father, and he answers, "No, ma'am, it's not." "Are we still in your territory?" He shakes his head. "We're going *fast*," my brother says approvingly, and in fact we are bouncing along through dry puddle-holes so that all the bottles in the suitcases clink together and gurgle promisingly.

Another lane, a house, also unpainted, dried to silver in the sun.

"I thought we were out of your territory."

"We are."

"Then what are we going in here for?"

"You'll see."

In front of the house a short, sturdy woman is picking up washing, which had been spread on the grass to bleach and dry. When the car stops she stares at it hard for a moment, bends to pick up a couple more towels to add to the bundle under her arm, comes across to us and says in a flat voice, neither welcoming nor unfriendly, "Have you lost your way?"

My father takes his time getting out of the car. "I don't think so," he says. "I'm the Walker Brothers man."

"George Golley is our Walker Brothers man," the woman says, "and he was out here no more than a week ago. Oh, my Lord God,"

she says harshly, "it's you."

"It was, the last time I looked in the mirror," my father says.

The woman gathers all the towels in front of her and holds on to them tightly, pushing them against her stomach as if it hurt. "Of all the people I never thought to see. And telling me you were the Walker Brothers man."

"I'm sorry if you were looking forward to George Golley," my father says humbly.

"And look at me, I was prepared to clean the henhouse. You'll think that's just an excuse but it's true. I don't go round looking like this every day." She is wearing a farmer's straw hat, through which pricks of sunlight penetrate and float on her face, a loose, dirty print smock, and canvas shoes. "Who are those in the car, Ben? They're not yours?"

"Well, I hope and believe they are," my father says, and tells our names and ages. "Come on, you can get out. This is Nora, Miss Cronin. Nora, you better tell me, is it still Miss, or have you got a husband hiding in the woodshed?"

"If I had a husband that's not where I'd keep him, Ben," she says, and they both laugh, her laugh abrupt and somewhat angry. "You'll think I got no manners, as well as being dressed like a tramp," she says. "Come on in out of the sun. It's cool in the house."

We go across the yard ("Excuse me taking you in this way but I don't think the front door has been opened since Papa's funeral, I'm afraid the hinges might drop off"), up the porch steps, into the kitchen, which really is cool, high-ceilinged, the blinds of course down, a simple, clean, threadbare room with waxed worn linoleum, potted geraniums, drinking-pail and dipper, a round table with scrubbed oilcloth. In spite of the cleanness, the wiped and swept surfaces, there is a faint sour smell—maybe of the dishrag or the tin dipper or the oilcloth, or the old lady, because there is one, sitting in an easy chair under the clock shelf. She turns her head slightly in our direction and says, "Nora? Is that company?"

"Blind," says Nora in a quick explaining voice to my father. Then, "You won't guess who it is, Momma. Hear his voice."

My father goes to the front of her chair and bends and says hopefully, "Afternoon, Mrs. Cronin."

"Ben Jordan," says the old lady with no surprise. "You haven't been to see us in the longest time. Have you been out of the country?"

My father and Nora look at each other.

"He's married, Momma," says Nora cheerfully and aggressively. "Married and got two children and here they are." She pulls us forward, makes each of us touch the old lady's dry, cool hand while she says our names in turn. Blind! This is the first blind person I have ever seen close up. Her eyes are closed, the eyelids sunk away down, showing no shape of the eyeball, just hollows. From one hollow comes a drop of silver liquid, a medicine, or a miraculous tear.

"Let me get into a decent dress," Nora says. "Talk to Momma. It's a treat for her. We hardly ever see company, do we, Momma?"

"Not many makes it out this road," says the old lady placidly. "And the ones that used to be around here, our old neighbors, some of them have pulled out."

"True everywhere," my father says.

"Where's your wife then?"

"Home. She's not too fond of the hot weather, makes her feel poorly."

"Well." This is a habit of country people, old people, to say "well," meaning, "Is that so?" with a little extra politeness and concern.

Nora's dress, when she appears again—stepping heavily on Cuban heels down the stairs in the hall—is flowered more lavishly than anything my mother owns, green and yellow on brown, some sort of floating sheer crêpe, leaving her arms bare. Her arms are heavy, and every bit of her skin you can see is covered with little dark freckles like measles. Her hair is short, black, coarse and curly, her teeth very white and strong. "It's the first time I knew there was such a thing as green poppies," my father says, looking at her dress.

"You would be surprised all the things you never knew," says Nora, sending a smell of cologne far and wide when she moves and

displaying a change of voice to go with the dress, something more sociable and youthful. "They're not poppies anyway, they're just flowers. You go and pump me some good cold water and I'll make these children a drink." She gets down from the cupboard a bottle of Walker Brothers Orange syrup.

"You telling me you were the Walker Brothers man!"

"It's the truth, Nora. You go and look at my sample cases in the car if you don't believe me. I got the territory directly south of here."

"Walker Brothers? Is that a fact? You selling for Walker Brothers?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"We always heard you were raising foxes over Dungannon way."

"That's what I was doing, but I kind of run out of luck in that business."

"So where're you living? How long've you been out selling?"

"We moved into Tuppertown. I been at it, oh, two, three months. It keeps the wolf from the door. Keeps him as far away as the back fence."

Nora laughs. "Well, I guess you count yourself lucky to have the work. Isabel's husband in Brantford, he was out of work the longest time. I thought if he didn't find something soon I was going to have them all land in here to feed, and I tell you I was hardly looking forward to it. It's all I can manage with me and Momma."

"Isabel married," my father says. "Muriel married too?"

"No, she's teaching school out West. She hasn't been home for five years. I guess she finds something better to do with her holidays. I would if I was her." She gets some snapshots out of the table drawer and starts showing him. "That's Isabel's oldest boy, starting school. That's the baby sitting in her carriage. Isabel and her husband. Muriel. That's her roommate with her. That's a fellow she used to go around with, and his car. He was working in a bank out there. That's her school, it has eight rooms. She teaches Grade Five." My father shakes his head. "I can't think of her any way but when she was going to school, so shy I used to pick her up on the road—

I'd be on my way to see you—and she would not say one word, not even to agree it was a nice day."

"She's got over that."

"Who are you talking about?" says the old lady.

"Muriel. I said she's got over being shy."

"She was here last summer."

"No, Momma, that was Isabel. Isabel and her family were here last summer. Muriel's out West."

"I meant Isabel."

Shortly after this the old lady falls asleep, her head on the side, her mouth open. "Excuse her manners," Nora says. "It's old age." She fixes an afghan over her mother and says we can all go into the front room where our talking won't disturb her.

"You two," my father says. "Do you want to go outside and amuse yourselves?"

Amuse ourselves how? Anyway, I want to stay. The front room is more interesting than the kitchen, though barer. There is a gramophone and a pump organ and a picture on the wall of Mary, Jesus' mother—I know that much—in shades of bright blue and pink with a spiked band of light around her head. I know that such pictures are found only in the homes of Roman Catholics and so Nora must be one. We have never known any Roman Catholics at all well, never well enough to visit in their houses. I think of what my grandmother and my Aunt Tena, over in Dungannon, used to always say to indicate that somebody was a Catholic. *So-and-so digs with the wrong foot*, they would say. *She digs with the wrong foot*. That was what they would say about Nora.⁵

Nora takes a bottle, half full, out of the top of the organ and pours some of what is in it into the two glasses that she and my father have emptied of the orange drink.

"Keep it in case of sickness?" my father says.

"Not on your life," says Nora. "I'm never sick. I just keep it because I keep it. One bottle does me a fair time, though, because I don't care for drinking alone. Here's luck!" She and my father drink

and I know what it is. Whisky. One of the things my mother has told me in our talks together is that my father never drinks whisky. But I see he does. He drinks whisky and he talks of people whose names I have never heard before. But after a while he turns to a familiar incident. He tells about the chamberpot that was emptied out the window. "Picture me there," he says, "hollering my heartiest. *Oh, lady, it's your Walker Brothers man, anybody home?*" He does himself hollering, grinning absurdly, waiting, looking up in pleased expectation, and then—oh, ducking, covering his head with his arms, looking as if he begged for mercy (when he never did anything like that, I was watching), and Nora laughs, almost as hard as my brother did at the time.

"That isn't true! That's not a word true!"

"Oh, indeed it is, ma'am. We have our heroes in the ranks of Walker Brothers. I'm glad you think it's funny," he says sombrely.

I ask him shyly, "Sing the song."

"What song? Have you turned into a singer on top of everything else?"

Embarrassed, my father says, "Oh, just this song I made up while I was driving around, it gives me something to do, making up rhymes."

But after some urging he does sing it, looking at Nora with a droll, apologetic expression, and she laughs so much that in places he has to stop and wait for her to get over laughing so he can go on, because she makes him laugh too. Then he does various parts of his salesman's spiel. Nora when she laughs squeezes her large bosom under her folded arms. "You're crazy," she says. "That's all you are." She sees my brother peering into the gramophone and she jumps up and goes over to him. "Here's us sitting enjoying ourselves and not giving you a thought, isn't it terrible?" she says. "You want me to put a record on, don't you? You want to hear a nice record? Can you dance? I bet your sister can, can't she?"

I say no. "A big girl like you and so good-looking and can't dance!" says Nora. "It's high time you learned. I bet you'd make a lovely dancer. Here, I'm going to put on a piece I used to dance to

and even your daddy did, in his dancing days. You didn't know your daddy was a dancer, did you? Well, he is a talented man, your daddy!".⁶

Round and round the linoleum, me proud, intent, Nora laughing and moving with great buoyancy, wrapping me in her strange gaiety, her smell of whisky, cologne, and sweat. Under the arms her dress is damp, and little drops form along her upper lip, hang in the soft black hairs at the corners of her mouth. She whirls me around in front of my father—causing me to stumble, for I am by no means so swift a pupil as she pretends—and lets me go, breathless.

"Dance with me, Ben."

"I'm the world's worst dancer, Nora, and you know it."

"I certainly never thought so."

"You would now."

She stands in front of him, arms hanging loose and hopeful, her breasts, which a moment ago embarrassed me with their warmth and bulk, rising and falling under her loose flowered dress, her face shining with the exercise, and delight.

"Ben."

My father drops his head and says quietly, "Not me, Nora."

So she can only go and take the record off. "I can drink alone but I can't dance alone," she says. "Unless I am a whole lot crazier than I think I am."

"Nora," says my father, smiling. "You're not crazy."

"Stay for supper."

"Oh, no. We couldn't put you to the trouble."

"It's no trouble. I'd be glad of it."

"And their mother would worry. She'd think I'd turned us over in a ditch."

"Oh, well. Yes."

"We've taken a lot of your time now."

"Time," says Nora bitterly. "Will you come by ever again?"

"I will if I can," says my father.

"Bring the children. Bring your wife."

"Yes, I will," says my father. "I will if I can."

When she follows us to the car he says, "You come to see us too, Nora. We're right on Grove Street, left-hand side going in, that's north, and two doors this side—east—of Baker Street."

Nora does not repeat these directions. She stands close to the car in her soft, brilliant dress. She touches the fender, making an unintelligible mark in the dust there.

On the way home my father does not buy any ice cream or pop, but he does go into a country store and get a package of licorice, which he shares with us. She digs with the wrong foot, I think, and the words seem sad to me as never before, dark, perverse. My father does not say anything to me about not mentioning things at home, but I know, just from the thoughtfulness, the pause when he passes the licorice, that there are things not to be mentioned. The whisky, maybe the dancing. No worry about my brother, he does not notice enough. At most he might remember the blind lady, the picture of Mary.

"Sing," my brother commands my father, but my father says gravely, "I don't know, I seem to be fresh out of songs. You watch the road and let me know if you see any rabbits."

So my father drives and my brother watches the road for rabbits and I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine.

When we get closer to Tuppertown the sky becomes gently overcast, as always, nearly always, on summer evenings by the Lake.

1968

Endnotes

- Note 1: Refers to a traveling salesman for a Canadian company, which is probably modeled on the American direct marketer Watkins Products.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In time for.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: One of the Great Lakes, bordering on Ontario and eastern Michigan. Place-names are both real and invented.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: River that begins in Colorado and flows south, becoming the border between Mexico and the United States.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Relations between Protestants and Catholics within the Irish population in southern Ontario were often strained.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: From the popular song “Whispering,” whose original 1920 release was one of the first records to sell a million copies.[Return to reference 6](#)

GEOFFREY HILL

1932–2016

Geoffrey Hill, born in the Worcestershire village of Bromsgrove, educated at its high school and at Keble College, Oxford, was a professor of English at Leeds University, a lecturer at Cambridge, and a professor at Boston University. In 2010 he was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford. As a boy he was drawn to the Metaphysical poets' "fusion of intellectual strength with simple, sensuous, and passionate immediacy," and his own poems offer something of the same fusion. What he said of "Annunciations: 2" might have been said of many of his poems: "But I want the poem to have this dubious end; because I feel dubious; and the whole business is dubious." He was a religious poet but a poet of religious doubt—a skeptic confronting the extremes of human experience, "man's inhumanity to man," on the cross and in the concentration camps—or delight in the abundance of the natural world: pain and pleasure alike rendered with a Keatsian richness and specificity, a modernist allusiveness and syntactic contortion. Distinctively resonant as is the voice of Hill's poems, they are consistently impersonal. Even when the poet's earlier self is conflated with that of historical figures, subjectivity is dissolved in the objective projection of a historical imagination of great range and power. The Holocaust poem "September Song" elegizes a victim of the Nazi concentration camps born the day after the poet was born, implicitly contrasting their divergent fates. Hill was at once one of the most

ambitious, most difficult, and most rewarding contemporary poets writing in English.

In Memory of Jane Fraser

When snow like sheep lay in the fold[°]
And winds went begging at each door,
And the far hills were blue with cold,
And a cold shroud lay on the moor,
5 She kept the siege. And every day
We watched her brooding over death
Like a strong bird above its prey.
The room filled with the kettle's breath.
Damp curtains glued against the pane
10 Sealed time away. Her body froze
As if to freeze us all, and chain
Creation to a stunned repose.
She died before the world could stir.
In March the ice unloosed the brook
15 And water ruffled the sun's hair.
Dead cones upon the alder shook.

1959

Notes

- °: *shelter for sheep*[Return to reference °](#)

Requiem for the Plantagenet Kings¹

For whom the possessed sea littered, on both
shores,

Ruinous arms; being fired, and for good,
To sound the constitution of just wars,
Men, in their eloquent fashion, understood.

5 Relieved of soul, the dropping-back of dust,
Their usage, pride, admitted within doors;
At home, under caved chantries,² set in trust,
With well-dressed alabaster and proved spurs
They lie; they lie; secure in the decay
10 Of blood, blood-marks, crowns hacked and coveted,
Before the scouring fires of trial-day
Alight on men; before sleeked groin, gored head,
Budge through the clay and gravel, and the sea
Across daubed rock evacuates its dead.

1959

Endnotes

- Note 1: Dynastic succession of 12th- to 15th-century English kings, beginning with Henry II, who was followed in turn by Richard I, John, Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, and Richard II. They ruled not only over England but also over much of France ("on both shores"). The last Plantagenet king was Richard III, who was killed at the Battle of Bosworth on Aug. 22, 1485. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Chapels endowed for priests to sing Masses for the souls of those who founded them. Many chantries have cavelike

ceilings of vaulted stone and contain effigies—sometimes in alabaster—of their founders.[Return to reference 2](#)

September Song¹

born 19.6.32—deported 24.9.42

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable
you were not. Not forgotten
or passed over at the proper time.

5 As estimated, you died. Things marched,
sufficient, to that end.
Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented
terror, so many routine cries.

10 (I have made
an elegy for myself it
is true)²

September fattens on vines. Roses
flake from the wall. The smoke
of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

This is plenty. This is more than enough.

1968

Endnotes

- Note 1:
The poem is about the gassing of Jews in German extermination camps; Zyklon-B was the gas used. Hill's fellow poet Jon Silkin has drawn attention to the kind of wit involved in the subtitle, "where the natural event of birth is placed, simply, beside the human and murderous 'deported' as if the latter were of the

same order and inevitability for the victim"; he discusses, too, "the irony of conjoined meanings between 'undesirable' (touching on both sexual desire and racism) and 'untouchable,' which exploits a similar ambiguity but reverses the emphases" and is "unusually dense *and* simple."

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: As the critic Christopher Ricks pointed out, Hill was born on 18.6.32 (June 18, 1932). [Return to reference 2](#)

Broken Hierarchies

When to depict rain—heavy rain—it stands
in dense verticals diagonally lashed,
chalk-white yet with the chalk translucent;

5 the roadway sprouts ten thousand flowerets,
storm-paddies instantly reaped, replenished,
and again cut down:

the holding burden of a wisteria
drape amid drape, the sodden
copia^o of all things flashing and drying:

10 first here after the storm these butterflies
fixed on each jinking^o run,
probing, priming, then leaping back,

a babble of silent tongues;
and the flint church also choiring
into dazzle

15

. . .

like Appalachian music, those
aureate^o stark sounds
plucked or bowed, a wild patience

replete with loss,
the twankled dulcimer,
20 scrawny rich fiddle gnawing;

a man's low voice that looms out of the drone:
the humming bird that is not

of these climes; and the great
25 wanderers like the albatross;
the ocean, ranging-in, laying itself
down on our alien shore.

2006

Notes

- °: *abundance*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *zigzagging*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *golden*[Return to reference](#) °

V. S. NAIPAUL

1932–2018

Widely regarded in his lifetime as the most accomplished novelist from the English-speaking Caribbean, Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born to a family of Indian descent in Trinidad and educated at Queen's Royal College, Port of Spain, and at University College, Oxford. After settling in England, he became editor of the *Caribbean Voices* program for the British Broadcasting Corporation (1954–56) and fiction reviewer for the *New Statesman* (1957–61). The recipient of many prestigious prizes and awards, he won the Booker Prize in 1971 for *In a Free State*, was knighted in 1990, and received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001.

Naipaul's first three books, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), and *Miguel Street* (short stories, 1959), are comedies of manners, set in a Trinidad viewed with an exile's acute and ironic eye. These early works present a starkly satiric vision, but a more modulated tone appears in Naipaul's first major novel, partly based on his father's experience, *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961). Following the declining fortunes of its gentle hero from cradle to grave, this tragicomic novel traces the disintegration of a traditional way of life on something approaching an epic scale. Subsequent novels, including *The Mimic Men* (1967), *Guerrillas* (1973), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), and *Half a Life* (2001), continued to explore the desperate and destructive conditions facing individuals as they struggle with cultures in complicated states of transition and

development. Because of his often bitter, even withering critiques of so-called Third World states and societies, Naipaul was controversial among readers of postcolonial fiction.

Naipaul also produced essays on a variety of themes, including a travel narrative about the southern United States, *A Turn in the South* (1988), another about African belief, *The Masque of Africa* (2010), and two studies—what he called “cultural explorations”—of Islam: *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981) and *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1998). Like his novels, these writings range widely, carrying readers to Africa, England, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, South and North America. With the years, Naipaul’s vision of the human condition grew darker and more pessimistic, as he brilliantly laid bare the insensitivities and disconnections that bedevil relations among individuals, races, and nations.

Such tremendous disjunctions and dire consequences are revealed in “One Out of Many,” the second of three stories that, with two linking diary entries, make up *In a Free State*, a bleakly ironic yet emotionally engaging study of what it means to be enslaved and what it means to be free. The story—its title playing on the American motto “*E pluribus unum*” (“from many, one”)—follows the fortunes of Santosh, an Indian immigrant to the United States, whose sense of self changes dramatically in relation to various liberating and imprisoning spaces and various ethnic, cultural, and sexual others. In contrast to narratives of immigration as empowerment, the story represents the promise of more freedom, more status, more economic opportunity in America as coming at the price of an intensified isolation and alienation. As in the literary journeys of other innocents abroad, Santosh’s immersion in America satirically reveals as much about the culture he assumes as about the culture he leaves behind.

One Out of Many

I am now an American citizen and I live in Washington, capital of the world. Many people, both here and in India, will feel that I have done well. But.

I was so happy in Bombay. I was respected, I had a certain position. I worked for an important man. The highest in the land came to our bachelor chambers and enjoyed my food and showered compliments on me. I also had my friends. We met in the evenings on the pavement below the gallery of our chambers. Some of us, like the tailor's bearer¹ and myself, were domestics who lived in the street. The others were people who came to that bit of pavement to sleep. Respectable people; we didn't encourage riff-raff.

In the evenings it was cool. There were few passers-by and, apart from an occasional double-decker bus or taxi, little traffic. The pavement was swept and sprinkled, bedding brought out from daytime hiding-places, little oil-lamps lit. While the folk upstairs chattered and laughed, on the pavement we read newspapers, played cards, told stories and smoked. The clay pipe passed from friend to friend; we became drowsy. Except of course during the monsoon,² I preferred to sleep on the pavement with my friends, although in our chambers a whole cupboard below the staircase was reserved for my personal use.

It was good after a healthy night in the open to rise before the sun and before the sweepers came. Sometimes I saw the street lights go off. Bedding was rolled up; no one spoke much; and soon my friends were hurrying in silent competition to secluded lanes and alleys and open lots to relieve themselves. I was spared this competition; in our chambers I had facilities.³

Afterwards for half an hour or so I was free simply to stroll. I liked walking beside the Arabian Sea, waiting for the sun to come up. Then the city and the ocean gleamed like gold. Alas for those

morning walks, that sudden ocean dazzle, the moist salt breeze on my face, the flap of my shirt, that first cup of hot sweet tea from a stall, the taste of the first leaf-cigarette.

Observe the workings of fate. The respect and security I enjoyed were due to the importance of my employer. It was this very importance which now all at once destroyed the pattern of my life.

My employer was seconded⁴ by his firm to Government service and was posted to Washington. I was happy for his sake but frightened for mine. He was to be away for some years and there was nobody in Bombay he could second me to. Soon, therefore, I was to be out of a job and out of the chambers. For many years I had considered my life as settled. I had served my apprenticeship, known my hard times. I didn't feel I could start again. I despaired. Was there a job for me in Bombay? I saw myself having to return to my village in the hills, to my wife and children there, not just for a holiday but for good. I saw myself again becoming a porter during the tourist season, racing after the buses as they arrived at the station and shouting with forty or fifty others for luggage. Indian luggage, not this lightweight American stuff! Heavy metal trunks!

I could have cried. It was no longer the sort of life for which I was fitted. I had grown soft in Bombay and I was no longer young. I had acquired possessions, I was used to the privacy of my cupboard. I had become a city man, used to certain comforts.

My employer said, "Washington is not Bombay, Santosh. Washington is expensive. Even if I was able to raise your fare, you wouldn't be able to live over there in anything like your present style."

But to be barefoot in the hills, after Bombay! The shock, the disgrace! I couldn't face my friends. I stopped sleeping on the pavement and spent as much of my free time as possible in my cupboard among my possessions, as among things which were soon to be taken from me.

My employer said, "Santosh, my heart bleeds for you."

I said, "Sahib,⁵ if I look a little concerned it is only because I worry about you. You have always been fussy, and I don't see how

you will manage in Washington."

"It won't be easy. But it's the principle. Does the representative of a poor country like ours travel about with his cook? Will that create a good impression?"

"You will always do what is right, sahib."

He went silent.

After some days he said, "There's not only the expense, Santosh. There's the question of foreign exchange. Our rupee⁶ isn't what it was."

"I understand, sahib. Duty is duty."

A fortnight later, when I had almost given up hope, he said, "Santosh, I have consulted Government. You will accompany me. Government has sanctioned, will arrange accommodation. But no expenses. You will get your passport and your P form. But I want you to think, Santosh. Washington is not Bombay."

I went down to the pavement that night with my bedding.

I said, blowing down my shirt, "Bombay gets hotter and hotter."

"Do you know what you are doing?" the tailor's bearer said. "Will the Americans smoke with you? Will they sit and talk with you in the evenings? Will they hold you by the hand and walk with you beside the ocean?"

It pleased me that he was jealous. My last days in Bombay were very happy.

I packed my employer's two suitcases and bundled up my own belongings in lengths of old cotton. At the airport they made a fuss about my bundles. They said they couldn't accept them as luggage for the hold because they didn't like the responsibility. So when the time came I had to climb up to the aircraft with all my bundles. The girl at the top, who was smiling at everybody else, stopped smiling when she saw me. She made me go right to the back of the plane, far from my employer. Most of the seats there were empty, though, and I was able to spread my bundles around and, well, it was comfortable.

It was bright and hot outside, cool inside. The plane started, rose up in the air, and Bombay and the ocean tilted this way and that. It was very nice. When we settled down I looked around for people like myself, but I could see no one among the Indians or the foreigners who looked like a domestic. Worse, they were all dressed as though they were going to a wedding and, brother, I soon saw it wasn't they who were conspicuous. I was in my ordinary Bombay clothes, the loose long-tailed shirt, the wide-waisted pants held up with a piece of string. Perfectly respectable domestic's wear, neither dirty nor clean, and in Bombay no one would have looked. But now on the plane I felt heads turning whenever I stood up.

I was anxious. I slipped off my shoes, tight even without the laces, and drew my feet up. That made me feel better. I made myself a little betel-nut⁷ mixture and that made me feel better still. Half the pleasure of betel, though, is the spitting; and it was only when I had worked up a good mouthful that I saw I had a problem. The airline girl saw too. That girl didn't like me at all. She spoke roughly to me. My mouth was full, my cheeks were bursting, and I couldn't say anything. I could only look at her. She went and called a man in uniform and he came and stood over me. I put my shoes back on and swallowed the betel juice. It made me feel quite ill.

The girl and the man, the two of them, pushed a little trolley of drinks down the aisle. The girl didn't look at me but the man said, "You want a drink, chum?" He wasn't a bad fellow. I pointed at random to a bottle. It was a kind of soda drink, nice and sharp at first but then not so nice. I was worrying about it when the girl said, "Five shillings sterling or sixty cents U.S." That took me by surprise. I had no money, only a few rupees. The girl stamped, and I thought she was going to hit me with her pad when I stood up to show her who my employer was.

Presently my employer came down the aisle. He didn't look very well. He said, without stopping, "Champagne, Santosh? Already we are overdoing?" He went on to the lavatory. When he passed back he said, "Foreign exchange, Santosh! Foreign exchange!" That was all. Poor fellow, he was suffering too.

The journey became miserable for me. Soon, with the wine I had drunk, the betel juice, the movement and the noise of the aeroplane, I was vomiting all over my bundles, and I didn't care what the girl said or did. Later there were more urgent and terrible needs. I felt I would choke in the tiny, hissing room at the back. I had a shock when I saw my face in the mirror. In the fluorescent light it was the colour of a corpse. My eyes were strained, the sharp air hurt my nose and seemed to get into my brain. I climbed up on the lavatory seat and squatted. I lost control of myself. As quickly as I could I ran back out into the comparative openness of the cabin and hoped no one had noticed. The lights were dim now; some people had taken off their jackets and were sleeping. I hoped the plane would crash.

The girl woke me up. She was almost screaming. "It's you, isn't it? Isn't it?"

I thought she was going to tear the shirt off me. I pulled back and leaned hard on the window. She burst into tears and nearly tripped on her sari as she ran up the aisle to get the man in uniform.

Nightmare. And all I knew was that somewhere at the end, after the airports and the crowded lounges where everybody was dressed up, after all those takeoffs and touchdowns, was the city of Washington. I wanted the journey to end but I couldn't say I wanted to arrive at Washington. I was already a little scared of that city, to tell the truth. I wanted only to be off the plane and to be in the open again, to stand on the ground and breathe and to try to understand what time of day it was.

At last we arrived. I was in a daze. The burden of those bundles! There were more closed rooms and electric lights. There were questions from officials.

"Is he diplomatic?"⁸

"He's only a domestic," my employer said.

"Is that his luggage? What's in that pocket?"

I was ashamed.

"Santosh," my employer said.

I pulled out the little packets of pepper and salt, the sweets, the envelopes with scented napkins, the toy tubes of mustard. Airline trinkets. I had been collecting them throughout the journey, seizing a handful, whatever my condition, every time I passed the galley.

"He's a cook," my employer said.

"Does he always travel with his condiments?"

"Santosh, Santosh," my employer said in the car afterwards, "in Bombay it didn't matter what you did. Over here you represent your country. I must say I cannot understand why your behaviour has already gone so much out of character."

"I am sorry, sahib."

"Look at it like this, Santosh. Over here you don't only represent your country, you represent me."

For the people of Washington it was late afternoon or early evening, I couldn't say which. The time and the light didn't match, as they did in Bombay. Of that drive I remember green fields, wide roads, many motor cars travelling fast, making a steady hiss, hiss, which wasn't at all like our Bombay traffic noise. I remember big buildings and wide parks; many bazaar areas; then smaller houses without fences and with gardens like bush, with the *hubshi*⁹ standing about or sitting down, more usually sitting down, everywhere. Especially I remember the *hubshi*. I had heard about them in stories and had seen one or two in Bombay. But I had never dreamt that this wild race existed in such numbers in Washington and were permitted to roam the streets so freely. O father, what was this place I had come to?

I wanted, I say, to be in the open, to breathe, to come to myself, to reflect. But there was to be no openness for me that evening. From the aeroplane to the airport building to the motor car to the apartment block to the elevator to the corridor to the apartment itself, I was forever enclosed, forever in the hissing, hissing sound of air-conditioners.

I was too dazed to take stock of the apartment. I saw it as only another halting place. My employer went to bed at once, completely exhausted, poor fellow. I looked around for my room. I couldn't find

it and gave up. Aching for the Bombay ways, I spread my bedding in the carpeted corridor just outside our apartment door. The corridor was long: doors, doors. The illuminated ceiling was decorated with stars of different sizes; the colours were grey and blue and gold. Below that imitation sky I felt like a prisoner.

Waking, looking up at the ceiling, I thought just for a second that I had fallen asleep on the pavement below the gallery of our Bombay chambers. Then I realized my loss. I couldn't tell how much time had passed or whether it was night or day. The only clue was that newspapers now lay outside some doors. It disturbed me to think that while I had been sleeping, alone and defenceless, I had been observed by a stranger and perhaps by more than one stranger.

I tried the apartment door and found I had locked myself out. I didn't want to disturb my employer. I thought I would get out into the open, go for a walk. I remembered where the elevator was. I got in and pressed the button. The elevator dropped fast and silently and it was like being in the aeroplane again. When the elevator stopped and the blue metal door slid open I saw plain concrete corridors and blank walls. The noise of machinery was very loud. I knew I was in the basement and the main floor was not far above me. But I no longer wanted to try; I gave up ideas of the open air. I thought I would just go back up to the apartment. But I hadn't noted the number and didn't even know what floor we were on. My courage flowed out of me. I sat on the floor of the elevator and felt the tears come to my eyes. Almost without noise the elevator door closed, and I found I was being taken up silently at great speed.

The elevator stopped and the door opened. It was my employer, his hair uncombed, yesterday's dirty shirt partly unbuttoned. He looked frightened.

"Santosh, where have you been at this hour of morning? Without your shoes."

I could have embraced him. He hurried me back past the newspapers to our apartment and I took the bedding inside. The

wide window showed the early morning sky, the big city; we were high up, way above the trees.

I said, "I couldn't find my room."

"Government sanctioned," my employer said. "Are you sure you've looked?"

We looked together. One little corridor led past the bathroom to his bedroom; another, shorter corridor led to the big room and the kitchen. There was nothing else.

"Government sanctioned," my employer said, moving about the kitchen and opening cupboard doors. "Separate entrance, shelving. I have the correspondence." He opened another door and looked inside. "Santosh, do you think it is possible that this is what Government meant?"

The cupboard he had opened was as high as the rest of the apartment and as wide as the kitchen, about six feet. It was about three feet deep. It had two doors. One door opened into the kitchen; another door, directly opposite, opened into the corridor.

"Separate entrance," my employer said. "Shelving, electric light, power point, fitted carpet."

"This must be my room, sahib."

"Santosh, some enemy in Government has done this to me."

"Oh no, sahib. You mustn't say that. Besides, it is very big. I will be able to make myself very comfortable. It is much bigger than my little cubby-hole in the chambers. And it has a nice flat ceiling. I wouldn't hit my head."

"You don't understand, Santosh. Bombay is Bombay. Here if we start living in cupboards we give the wrong impression. They will think we all live in cupboards in Bombay."

"O sahib, but they can just look at me and see I am dirt."

"You are very good, Santosh. But these people are malicious. Still, if you are happy, then I am happy."

"I am very happy, sahib."

And after all the upset, I was. It was nice to crawl in that evening, spread my bedding and feel protected and hidden. I slept

very well.

In the morning my employer said, "We must talk about money, Santosh. Your salary is one hundred rupees a month. But Washington isn't Bombay. Everything is a little bit more expensive here, and I am going to give you a Dearness Allowance. As from today you are getting one hundred and fifty rupees."

"Sahib."

"And I'm giving you a fortnight's pay in advance. In foreign exchange. Seventy-five rupees. Ten cents to the rupee, seven hundred and fifty cents. Seven fifty U.S. Here, Santosh. This afternoon you go out and have a little walk and enjoy. But be careful. We are not among friends, remember."

So at last, rested, with money in my pocket, I went out in the open. And of course the city wasn't a quarter as frightening as I had thought. The buildings weren't particularly big, not all the streets were busy, and there were many lovely trees. A lot of the *hubshi* were about, very wild-looking some of them, with dark glasses and their hair frizzed out, but it seemed that if you didn't trouble them they didn't attack you.

I was looking for a café or a tea-stall where perhaps domestics congregated. But I saw no domestics, and I was chased away from the place I did eventually go into. The girl said, after I had been waiting some time, "Can't you read? We don't serve hippies or bare feet here."

O father! I had come out without my shoes. But what a country, I thought, walking briskly away, where people are never allowed to dress normally but must forever wear their very best! Why must they wear out shoes and fine clothes for no purpose? What occasion are they honouring? What waste, what presumption! Who do they think is noticing them all the time?

And even while these thoughts were in my head I found I had come to a roundabout with trees and a fountain where—and it was like a fulfilment in a dream, not easy to believe—there were many people who looked like my own people. I tightened the string around

my loose pants, held down my flapping shirt and ran through the traffic to the green circle.

Some of the *hubshi* were there, playing musical instruments and looking quite happy in their way. There were some Americans sitting about on the grass and the fountain and the kerb. Many of them were in rough, friendly-looking clothes; some were without shoes; and I felt I had been over hasty in condemning the entire race. But it wasn't these people who had attracted me to the circle. It was the dancers. The men were bearded, barefooted and in saffron robes, and the girls were in saris and canvas shoes that looked like our own Bata shoes.¹ They were shaking little cymbals and chanting and lifting their heads up and down and going round in a circle, making a lot of dust. It was a little bit like a Red Indian dance in a cowboy movie, but they were chanting Sanskrit words in praise of Lord Krishna.²

I was very pleased. But then a disturbing thought came to me. It might have been because of the half-caste³ appearance of the dancers; it might have been their bad Sanskrit pronunciation and their accent. I thought that these people were now strangers, but that perhaps once upon a time they had been like me. Perhaps, as in some story, they had been brought here among the *hubshi* as captives a long time ago and had become a lost people, like our own wandering gipsy folk, and had forgotten who they were. When I thought that, I lost my pleasure in the dancing; and I felt for the dancers the sort of distaste we feel when we are faced with something that should be kin but turns out not to be, turns out to be degraded, like a deformed man, or like a leper, who from a distance looks whole.

I didn't stay. Not far from the circle I saw a café which appeared to be serving bare feet. I went in, had a coffee and a nice piece of cake and bought a pack of cigarettes; matches they gave me free with the cigarettes. It was all right, but then the bare feet began looking at me, and one bearded fellow came and sniffed loudly at me and smiled and spoke some sort of gibberish, and then some others of the bare feet came and sniffed at me. They weren't

unfriendly, but I didn't appreciate the behaviour; and it was a little frightening to find, when I left the place, that two or three of them appeared to be following me. They weren't unfriendly, but I didn't want to take any chances. I passed a cinema; I went in. It was something I wanted to do anyway. In Bombay I used to go once a week.

And that was all right. The movie had already started. It was in English, not too easy for me to follow, and it gave me time to think. It was only there, in the darkness, that I thought about the money I had been spending. The prices had seemed to me very reasonable, like Bombay prices. Three for the movie ticket, one fifty in the café, with tip. But I had been thinking in rupees and paying in dollars. In less than an hour I had spent nine days' pay.

I couldn't watch the movie after that. I went out and began to make my way back to the apartment block. Many more of the *hubshi* were about now and I saw that where they congregated the pavement was wet, and dangerous with broken glass and bottles. I couldn't think of cooking when I got back to the apartment. I couldn't bear to look at the view. I spread my bedding in the cupboard, lay down in the darkness and waited for my employer to return.

When he did I said, "Sahib, I want to go home."

"Santosh, I've paid five thousand rupees to bring you here. If I send you back now, you will have to work for six or seven years without salary to pay me back."

I burst into tears.

"My poor Santosh, something has happened. Tell me what has happened."

"Sahib, I've spent more than half the advance you gave me this morning. I went out and had a coffee and cake and then I went to a movie."

His eyes went small and twinkly behind his glasses. He bit the inside of his top lip, scraped at his moustache with his lower teeth, and he said, "You see, you see. I told you it was expensive."

I understood I was a prisoner. I accepted this and adjusted. I learned to live within the apartment, and I was even calm.

My employer was a man of taste and he soon had the apartment looking like something in a magazine, with books and Indian paintings and Indian fabrics and pieces of sculpture and bronze statues of our gods. I was careful to take no delight in it. It was of course very pretty, especially with the view. But the view remained foreign and I never felt that the apartment was real, like the shabby old Bombay chambers with the cane chairs, or that it had anything to do with me.

When people came to dinner I did my duty. At the appropriate time I would bid the company goodnight, close off the kitchen behind its folding screen and pretend I was leaving the apartment. Then I would lie down quietly in my cupboard and smoke. I was free to go out; I had my separate entrance. But I didn't like being out of the apartment. I didn't even like going down to the laundry room in the basement.

Once or twice a week I went to the supermarket on our street. I always had to walk past groups of *hubshi* men and children. I tried not to look, but it was hard. They sat on the pavement, on steps and in the bush around their redbrick houses, some of which had boarded-up windows. They appeared to be very much a people of the open air, with little to do; even in the mornings some of the men were drunk.

Scattered among the *hubshi* houses were others just as old but with gas-lamps that burned night and day in the entrance. These were the houses of the Americans. I seldom saw these people; they didn't spend much time on the street. The lighted gas-lamp was the American way of saying that though a house looked old outside it was nice and new inside. I also felt that it was like a warning to the *hubshi* to keep off.

Outside the supermarket there was always a policeman with a gun. Inside, there were always a couple of *hubshi* guards with truncheons, and, behind the cashiers, some old *hubshi* beggar men in rags. There were also many young *hubshi* boys, small but

muscular, waiting to carry parcels, as once in the hills I had waited to carry Indian tourists' luggage.

These trips to the supermarket were my only outings, and I was always glad to get back to the apartment. The work there was light. I watched a lot of television and my English improved. I grew to like certain commercials very much. It was in these commercials I saw the Americans whom in real life I so seldom saw and knew only by their gas-lamps. Up there in the apartment, with a view of the white domes and towers and greenery of the famous city, I entered the homes of the Americans and saw them cleaning those homes. I saw them cleaning floors and dishes. I saw them buying clothes and cleaning clothes, buying motor cars and cleaning motor cars. I saw them cleaning, cleaning.

The effect of all this television on me was curious. If by some chance I saw an American on the street I tried to fit him or her into the commercials; and I felt I had caught the person in an interval between his television duties. So to some extent Americans have remained to me, as people not quite real, as people temporarily absent from television.

Sometimes a *hubshi* came on the screen, not to talk of *hubshi* things, but to do a little cleaning of his own. That wasn't the same. He was too different from the *hubshi* I saw on the street and I knew he was an actor. I knew that his television duties were only make-believe and that he would soon have to return to the street.

One day at the supermarket, when the *hubshi* girl took my money, she sniffed and said, "You always smell sweet, baby."

She was friendly, and I was at last able to clear up that mystery, of my smell. It was the poor country weed I smoked. It was a peasant taste of which I was slightly ashamed, to tell the truth; but the cashier was encouraging. As it happened, I had brought a quantity of the weed with me from Bombay in one of my bundles, together with a hundred razor blades, believing both weed and blades to be purely Indian things. I made an offering to the girl. In return she taught me a few words of English. "Me black and

beautiful"⁴ was the first thing she taught me. Then she pointed to the policeman with the gun outside and taught me: "He pig."

My English lessons were taken a stage further by the *hubshi* maid who worked for someone on our floor in the apartment block. She too was attracted by my smell, but I soon began to feel that she was also attracted by my smallness and strangeness. She herself was a big woman, broad in the face, with high cheeks and bold eyes and lips that were full but not pendulous. Her largeness disturbed me; I found it better to concentrate on her face. She misunderstood; there were times when she frolicked with me in a violent way. I didn't like it, because I couldn't fight her off as well as I would have liked and because in spite of myself I was fascinated by her appearance. Her smell mixed with the perfumes she used could have made me forget myself.

She was always coming into the apartment. She disturbed me while I was watching the Americans on television. I feared the smell she left behind. Sweat, perfume, my own weed: the smells lay thick in the room, and I prayed to the bronze gods my employer had installed as living-room ornaments that I would not be dishonoured. Dishonoured, I say; and I know that this might seem strange to people over here, who have permitted the *hubshi* to settle among them in such large numbers and must therefore esteem them in certain ways. But in our country we frankly do not care for the *hubshi*. It is written in our books, both holy and not so holy, that it is indecent and wrong for a man of our blood to embrace the *hubshi* woman. To be dishonoured in this life, to be born a cat or a monkey or a *hubshi* in the next!

But I was falling. Was it idleness and solitude? I was found attractive: I wanted to know why. I began to go to the bathroom of the apartment simply to study my face in the mirror. I cannot easily believe it myself now, but in Bombay a week or a month could pass without my looking in the mirror; then it wasn't to consider my looks but to check whether the barber had cut off too much hair or whether a pimple was about to burst. Slowly I made a discovery. My face was handsome. I had never thought of myself in this way. I had

thought of myself as unnoticeable, with features that served as identification alone.

The discovery of my good looks brought its strains. I became obsessed with my appearance, with a wish to see myself. It was like an illness. I would be watching television, for instance, and I would be surprised by the thought: are you as handsome as that man? I would have to get up and go to the bathroom and look in the mirror.

I thought back to the time when these matters hadn't interested me, and I saw how ragged I must have looked, on the aeroplane, in the airport, in that café for bare feet, with the rough and dirty clothes I wore, without doubt or question, as clothes befitting a servant. I was choked with shame. I saw, too, how good people in Washington had been, to have seen me in rags and yet to have taken me for a man.

I was glad I had a place to hide. I had thought of myself as a prisoner. Now I was glad I had so little of Washington to cope with: the apartment, my cupboard, the television set, my employer, the walk to the supermarket, the *hubshi* woman. And one day I found I no longer knew whether I wanted to go back to Bombay. Up there, in the apartment, I no longer knew what I wanted to do.

I became more careful of my appearance. There wasn't much I could do. I bought laces for my old black shoes, socks, a belt. Then some money came my way. I had understood that the weed I smoked was of value to the *hubshi* and the bare feet; I disposed of what I had, disadvantageously as I now know, through the *hubshi* girl at the supermarket. I got just under two hundred dollars. Then, as anxiously as I had got rid of my weed, I went out and bought some clothes.

I still have the things I bought that morning. A green hat, a green suit. The suit was always too big for me. Ignorance, inexperience; but I also remember the feeling of presumption. The salesman wanted to talk, to do his job. I didn't want to listen. I took the first suit he showed me and went into the cubicle and changed. I couldn't think about size and fit. When I considered all that cloth and

all that tailoring I was proposing to adorn my simple body with, that body that needed so little, I felt I was asking to be destroyed. I changed back quickly, went out of the cubicle and said I would take the green suit. The salesman began to talk; I cut him short; I asked for a hat. When I got back to the apartment I felt quite weak and had to lie down for a while in my cupboard.

I never hung the suit up. Even in the shop, even while counting out the precious dollars, I had known it was a mistake. I kept the suit folded in the box with all its pieces of tissue paper. Three or four times I put it on and walked about the apartment and sat down on chairs and lit cigarettes and crossed my legs, practising. But I couldn't bring myself to wear the suit out of doors. Later I wore the pants, but never the jacket. I never bought another suit; I soon began wearing the sort of clothes I wear today, pants with some sort of zippered jacket.

Once I had had no secrets from my employer; it was so much simpler not to have secrets. But some instinct told me now it would be better not to let him know about the green suit or the few dollars I had, just as instinct had already told me I should keep my growing knowledge of English to myself.

Once my employer had been to me only a presence. I used to tell him then that beside him I was as dirt. It was only a way of talking, one of the courtesies of our language, but it had something of truth. I meant that he was the man who adventured in the world for me, that I experienced the world through him, that I was content to be a small part of his presence. I was content, sleeping on the Bombay pavement with my friends, to hear the talk of my employer and his guests upstairs. I was more than content, late at night, to be identified among the sleepers and greeted by some of those guests before they drove away.

Now I found that, without wishing it, I was ceasing to see myself as part of my employer's presence, and beginning at the same time to see him as an outsider might see him, as perhaps the people who came to dinner in the apartment saw him. I saw that he was a man of my own age, around thirty-five; it astonished me that I hadn't

noticed this before. I saw that he was plump, in need of exercise, that he moved with short, fussy steps; a man with glasses, thinning hair, and that habit, during conversation, of scraping at his moustache with his teeth and nibbling at the inside of his top lip; a man who was frequently anxious, took pains over his work, was subjected at his own table to unkind remarks by his office colleagues; a man who looked as uneasy in Washington as I felt, who acted as cautiously as I had learned to act.

I remember an American who came to dinner. He looked at the pieces of sculpture in the apartment and said he had himself brought back a whole head from one of our ancient temples; he had got the guide to hack it off.

I could see that my employer was offended. He said, "But that's illegal."

"That's why I had to give the guide two dollars. If I had a bottle of whisky he would have pulled down the whole temple for me."

My employer's face went blank. He continued to do his duties as host but he was unhappy throughout the dinner. I grieved for him.

Afterwards he knocked on my cupboard. I knew he wanted to talk. I was in my underclothes but I didn't feel underdressed, with the American gone. I stood in the door of my cupboard; my employer paced up and down the small kitchen; the apartment felt sad.

"Did you hear that person, Santosh?"

I pretended I hadn't understood, and when he explained I tried to console him. I said, "Sahib, but we know these people are Franks⁵ and barbarians."

"They are malicious people, Santosh. They think that because we are a poor country we are all the same. They think an official in Government is just the same as some poor guide scraping together a few rupees to keep body and soul together, poor fellow."

I saw that he had taken the insult only in a personal way, and I was disappointed. I thought he had been thinking of the temple.

A few days later I had my adventure. The *hubshi* woman came in, moving among my employer's ornaments like a bull. I was greatly provoked. The smell was too much; so was the sight of her armpits. I fell. She dragged me down on the couch, on the saffron spread which was one of my employer's nicest pieces of Punjabi folk-weaving. I saw the moment, helplessly, as one of dishonour. I saw her as Kali,⁶ goddess of death and destruction, coal-black, with a red tongue and white eyeballs and many powerful arms. I expected her to be wild and fierce; but she added insult to injury by being very playful, as though, because I was small and strange, the act was not real. She laughed all the time. I would have liked to withdraw, but the act took over and completed itself. And then I felt dreadful.

I wanted to be forgiven, I wanted to be cleansed, I wanted her to go. Nothing frightened me more than the way she had ceased to be a visitor in the apartment and behaved as though she possessed it. I looked at the sculpture and the fabrics and thought of my poor employer, suffering in his office somewhere.

I bathed and bathed afterwards. The smell would not leave me. I fancied that the woman's oil was still on that poor part of my poor body. It occurred to me to rub it down with half a lemon. Penance and cleansing; but it didn't hurt as much as I expected, and I extended the penance by rolling about naked on the floor of the bathroom and the sitting-room and howling. At last the tears came, real tears, and I was comforted.

It was cool in the apartment; the air-conditioning always hummed; but I could see that it was hot outside, like one of our own summer days in the hills. The urge came upon me to dress as I might have done in my village on a religious occasion. In one of my bundles I had a dhoti⁷-length of new cotton, a gift from the tailor's bearer that I had never used. I draped this around my waist and between my legs, lit incense sticks, sat down cross-legged on the floor and tried to meditate and become still. Soon I began to feel hungry. That made me happy; I decided to fast.

Unexpectedly my employer came in. I didn't mind being caught in the attitude and garb of prayer; it could have been so much worse. But I wasn't expecting him till late afternoon.

"Santosh, what has happened?"

Pride got the better of me. I said, "Sahib, it is what I do from time to time."

But I didn't find merit in his eyes. He was far too agitated to notice me properly. He took off his lightweight fawn jacket, dropped it on the saffron spread, went to the refrigerator and drank two tumblers of orange juice, one after the other. Then he looked out at the view, scraping at his moustache.

"Oh, my poor Santosh, what are we doing in this place? Why do we have to come here?"

I looked with him. I saw nothing unusual. The wide window showed the colours of the hot day: the pale-blue sky, the white, almost colourless, domes of famous buildings rising out of dead-green foliage; the untidy roofs of apartment blocks where on Saturday and Sunday mornings people sunbathed; and, below, the fronts and backs of houses on the tree-lined street down which I walked to the supermarket.

My employer turned off the air-conditioning and all noise was absent from the room. An instant later I began to hear the noises outside: sirens far and near. When my employer slid the window open the roar of the disturbed city rushed into the room. He closed the window and there was near-silence again. Not far from the supermarket I saw black smoke, uncurling, rising, swiftly turning colourless. This was not the smoke which some of the apartment blocks gave off all day. This was the smoke of a real fire.

"The *hubshi* have gone wild, Santosh. They are burning down Washington."

I didn't mind at all. Indeed, in my mood of prayer and repentance, the news was even welcome. And it was with a feeling of release that I watched and heard the city burn that afternoon and watched it burn that night. I watched it burn again and again on television; and I watched it burn in the morning. It burned like a

famous city and I didn't want it to stop burning. I wanted the fire to spread and spread and I wanted everything in the city, even the apartment block, even the apartment, even myself, to be destroyed and consumed. I wanted escape to be impossible; I wanted the very idea of escape to become absurd. At every sign that the burning was going to stop I felt disappointed and let down.

For four days my employer and I stayed in the apartment and watched the city burn. The television continued to show us what we could see and what, whenever we slid the window back, we could hear. Then it was over. The view from our window hadn't changed. The famous buildings stood; the trees remained. But for the first time since I had understood that I was a prisoner I found that I wanted to be out of the apartment and in the streets.

The destruction lay beyond the supermarket. I had never gone into this part of the city before, and it was strange to walk in those long wide streets for the first time, to see trees and houses and shops and advertisements, everything like a real city, and then to see that every signboard on every shop was burnt or stained with smoke, that the shops themselves were black and broken, that flames had burst through some of the upper windows and scorched the red bricks. For mile after mile it was like that. There were *hubshi* groups about, and at first when I passed them I pretended to be busy, minding my own business, not at all interested in the ruins. But they smiled at me and I found I was smiling back. Happiness was on the faces of the *hubshi*. They were like people amazed they could do so much, that so much lay in their power. They were like people on holiday. I shared their exhilaration.

The idea of escape was a simple one, but it hadn't occurred to me before. When I adjusted to my imprisonment I had wanted only to get away from Washington and to return to Bombay. But then I had become confused. I had looked in the mirror and seen myself, and I knew it wasn't possible for me to return to Bombay to the sort of job I had had and the life I had lived. I couldn't easily become part of someone else's presence again. Those evening chats on the

pavement, those morning walks: happy times, but they were like the happy times of childhood: I didn't want them to return.

I had taken, after the fire, to going for long walks in the city. And one day, when I wasn't even thinking of escape, when I was just enjoying the sights and my new freedom of movement, I found myself in one of those leafy streets where private houses had been turned into business premises. I saw a fellow countryman superintending the raising of a signboard on his gallery. The signboard told me that the building was a restaurant, and I assumed that the man in charge was the owner. He looked worried and slightly ashamed, and he smiled at me. This was unusual, because the Indians I had seen on the streets of Washington pretended they hadn't seen me; they made me feel that they didn't like the competition of my presence or didn't want me to start asking them difficult questions.

I complimented the worried man on his signboard and wished him good luck in his business. He was a small man of about fifty and he was wearing a double-breasted suit with old-fashioned wide lapels. He had dark hollows below his eyes and he looked as though he had recently lost a little weight. I could see that in our country he had been a man of some standing, not quite the sort of person who would go into the restaurant business. I felt at one with him. He invited me in to look around, asked my name and gave his. It was Priya.

Just past the gallery was the loveliest and richest room I had ever seen. The wallpaper was like velvet; I wanted to pass my hand over it. The brass lamps that hung from the ceiling were in a lovely cut-out pattern and the bulbs were of many colours. Priya looked with me, and the hollows under his eyes grew darker, as though my admiration was increasing his worry at his extravagance. The restaurant hadn't yet opened for customers and on a shelf in one corner I saw Priya's collection of good-luck objects: a brass plate with a heap of uncooked rice, for prosperity; a little copybook and a little diary pencil, for good luck with the accounts; a little clay lamp, for general good luck.

"What do you think, Santosh? You think it will be all right?"

"It is bound to be all right, Priya."

"But I have enemies, you know, Santosh. The Indian restaurant people are not going to appreciate me. All mine, you know, Santosh. Cash paid. No mortgage or anything like that. I don't believe in mortgages. Cash or nothing."

I understood him to mean that he had tried to get a mortgage and failed, and was anxious about money.

"But what are you doing here, Santosh? You used to be in Government or something?"

"You could say that, Priya."

"Like me. They have a saying here. If you can't beat them, join them. I joined them. They are still beating me." He sighed and spread his arms on the top of the red wall-seat. "Ah, Santosh, why do we do it? Why don't we renounce and go and meditate on the riverbank?" He waved about the room. "The yemblems⁸ of the world, Santosh. Just yemblems."

I didn't know the English word he used, but I understood its meaning; and for a moment it was like being back in Bombay, exchanging stories and philosophies with the tailor's bearer and others in the evening.

"But I am forgetting, Santosh. You will have some tea or coffee or something?"

I shook my head from side to side to indicate that I was agreeable, and he called out in a strange harsh language to someone behind the kitchen door.

"Yes, Santosh. Yem-*blems*!" And he sighed and slapped the red seat hard.

A man came out from the kitchen with a tray. At first he looked like a fellow countryman, but in a second I could tell he was a stranger.

"You are right," Priya said, when the stranger went back to the kitchen. "He is not of Bharat. He is a Mexican. But what can I do? You get fellow countrymen, you fix up their papers and everything.

And then? Then they run away. Run-run-runaway. Crooks this side, crooks that side, I can't tell you. Listen, Santosh. I was in cloth business before. Buy for fifty rupees that side, sell for fifty dollars this side. Easy. But then. Caftan, everybody wants caftan. Caftan-aftan, I say, I will settle your caftan. I buy one thousand, Santosh. Delays India-side,⁹ of course. They come one year later. Nobody wants caftan then. We're not organized, Santosh. We don't do enough consumer research. That's what the fellows at the embassy tell me. But if I do consumer research, when will I do my business? The trouble, you know, Santosh, is that this shopkeeping is not in my blood. The damn thing goes *against* my blood. When I was in cloth business I used to hide sometimes for shame when a customer came in. Sometimes I used to pretend I was a shopper myself. Consumer research! These people make us dance, Santosh. You and I, we will renounce. We will go together and walk beside Potomac and meditate."

I loved his talk. I hadn't heard anything so sweet and philosophical since the Bombay days. I said, "Priya, I will cook for you, if you want a cook."

"I feel I've known you a long time, Santosh. I feel you are like a member of my own family. I will give you a place to sleep, a little food to eat and a little pocket money, as much as I can afford."

I said, "Show me the place to sleep."

He led me out of the pretty room and up a carpeted staircase. I was expecting the carpet and the new paint to stop somewhere, but it was nice and new all the way. We entered a room that was like a smaller version of my employer's apartment.

"Built-in cupboards and everything, you see, Santosh."

I went to the cupboard. It had a folding door that opened outward. I said, "Priya, it is too small. There is room on the shelf for my belongings. But I don't see how I can spread my bedding inside here. It is far too narrow."

He giggled nervously. "Santosh, you are a joker. I feel that we are of the same family already."

Then it came to me that I was being offered the whole room. I was stunned.

Priya looked stunned too. He sat down on the edge of the soft bed. The dark hollows under his eyes were almost black and he looked very small in his double-breasted jacket. "This is how they make us dance over here, Santosh. You say staff quarters and they say staff quarters. This is what they mean."

For some seconds we sat silently, I fearful, he gloomy, meditating on the ways of this new world.

Someone called from downstairs, "Priya!"

His gloom gone, smiling in advance, winking at me, Priya called back in an accent of the country, "Hi, Bab!"

I followed him down.

"Priya," the American said, "I've brought over the menus."

He was a tall man in a leather jacket, with jeans that rode up above thick white socks and big rubber-soled shoes. He looked like someone about to run in a race. The menus were enormous; on the cover there was a drawing of a fat man with a moustache and a plumed turban, something like the man in the airline advertisements.

"They look great, Bab."

"I like them myself. But what's that, Priya? What's that shelf doing there?"

Moving like the front part of a horse, Bab walked to the shelf with the rice and the brass plate and the little clay lamp. It was only then that I saw that the shelf was very roughly made.

Priya looked penitent and it was clear he had put the shelf up himself. It was also clear he didn't intend to take it down.

"Well, it's yours," Bab said. "I suppose we had to have a touch of the East somewhere. Now, Priya—"

"Money-money-money, is it?" Priya said, racing the words together as though he was making a joke to amuse a child. "But, Bab, how can *you ask me* for money? Anybody hearing you would believe that this restaurant is mine. But this restaurant isn't mine, Bab. This restaurant is yours."

It was only one of our courtesies, but it puzzled Bab and he allowed himself to be led to other matters.

I saw that, for all his talk of renunciation and business failure, and for all his jumpiness, Priya was able to cope with Washington. I admired this strength in him as much as I admired the richness of his talk. I didn't know how much to believe of his stories, but I liked having to guess about him. I liked having to play with his words in my mind. I liked the mystery of the man. The mystery came from his solidity. I knew where I was with him. After the apartment and the green suit and the *hubshi* woman and the city burning for four days, to be with Priya was to feel safe. For the first time since I had come to Washington I felt safe.

I can't say that I moved in. I simply stayed. I didn't want to go back to the apartment even to collect my belongings. I was afraid that something might happen to keep me a prisoner there. My employer might turn up and demand his five thousand rupees. The *hubshi* woman might claim me for her own; I might be condemned to a life among the *hubshi*. And it wasn't as if I was leaving behind anything of value in the apartment. The green suit I was even happy to forget. But.

Priya paid me forty dollars a week. After what I was getting, three dollars and seventy-five cents, it seemed a lot; and it was more than enough for my needs. I didn't have much temptation to spend, to tell the truth. I knew that my old employer and the *hubshi* woman would be wondering about me in their respective ways and I thought I should keep off the streets for a while. That was no hardship; it was what I was used to in Washington. Besides, my days at the restaurant were pretty full; for the first time in my life I had little leisure.

The restaurant was a success from the start, and Priya was fussy. He was always bursting into the kitchen with one of those big menus in his hand, saying in English, "Prestige job, Santosh, prestige." I didn't mind. I liked to feel I had to do things perfectly; I felt I was earning my freedom. Though I was in hiding, and though I worked

every day until midnight, I felt I was much more in charge of myself than I had ever been.

Many of our waiters were Mexicans, but when we put turbans on them they could pass. They came and went, like the Indian staff. I didn't get on with these people. They were frightened and jealous of one another and very treacherous. Their talk amid the biryanis and the pillaus¹ was all of papers and green cards. They were always about to get green cards or they had been cheated out of green cards or they had just got green cards. At first I didn't know what they were talking about. When I understood I was more than depressed.

I understood that because I had escaped from my employer I had made myself illegal in America. At any moment I could be denounced, seized, jailed, deported, disgraced. It was a complication. I had no green card; I didn't know how to set about getting one; and there was no one I could talk to.

I felt burdened by my secrets. Once I had none; now I had so many. I couldn't tell Priya I had no green card. I couldn't tell him I had broken faith with my old employer and dishonoured myself with a *hubshi* woman and lived in fear of retribution. I couldn't tell him that I was afraid to leave the restaurant and that nowadays when I saw an Indian I hid from him as anxiously as the Indian hid from me. I would have felt foolish to confess. With Priya, right from the start, I had pretended to be strong; and I wanted it to remain like that. Instead, when we talked now, and he grew philosophical, I tried to find bigger causes for being sad. My mind fastened on to these causes, and the effect of this was that my sadness became like a sickness of the soul.

It was worse than being in the apartment, because now the responsibility was mine and mine alone. I had decided to be free, to act for myself. It pained me to think of the exhilaration I had felt during the days of the fire; and I felt mocked when I remembered that in the early days of my escape I had thought I was in charge of myself.

The year turned. The snow came and melted. I was more afraid than ever of going out. The sickness was bigger than all the causes. I saw the future as a hole into which I was dropping. Sometimes at night when I awakened my body would burn and I would feel the hot perspiration break all over.

I leaned on Priya. He was my only hope, my only link with what was real. He went out; he brought back stories. He went out especially to eat in the restaurants of our competitors.

He said, "Santosh, I never believed that running a restaurant was a way to God. But it is true. I eat like a scientist. Every day I eat like a scientist. I feel I have already renounced."

This was Priya. This was how his talk ensnared me and gave me the bigger causes that steadily weakened me. I became more and more detached from the men in the kitchen. When they spoke of their green cards and the jobs they were about to get I felt like asking them: Why? Why?

And every day the mirror told its own tale. Without exercise, with the sickening of my heart and my mind, I was losing my looks. My face had become pudgy and sallow and full of spots; it was becoming ugly. I could have cried for that, discovering my good looks only to lose them. It was like a punishment for my presumption, the punishment I had feared when I bought the green suit.

Priya said, "Santosh, you must get some exercise. You are not looking well. Your eyes are getting like mine. What are you pining for? Are you pining for Bombay or your family in the hills?"

But now, even in my mind, I was a stranger in those places.

Priya said one Sunday morning, "Santosh, I am going to take you to see a Hindi movie today. All the Indians of Washington will be there, domestics and everybody else."

I was very frightened. I didn't want to go and I couldn't tell him why. He insisted. My heart began to beat fast as soon as I got into the car. Soon there were no more houses with gas-lamps in the entrance, just those long wide burnt-out *hubshi* streets, now with fresh leaves on the trees, heaps of rubble on bulldozed, fenced-in

lots, boarded-up shop windows, and old smoke-stained signboards announcing what was no longer true. Cars raced along the wide roads; there was life only on the roads. I thought I would vomit with fear.

I said, "Take me back, *sahib*."

I had used the wrong word. Once I had used the word a hundred times a day. But then I had considered myself a small part of my employer's presence, and the word was not servile; it was more like a name, like a reassuring sound, part of my employer's dignity and therefore part of mine. But Priya's dignity could never be mine; that was not our relationship. Priya I had always called Priya; it was his wish, the American way, man to man. With Priya the word was servile. And he responded to the word. He did as I asked; he drove me back to the restaurant. I never called him by his name again.

I was good-looking; I had lost my looks. I was a free man; I had lost my freedom.

One of the Mexican waiters came into the kitchen late one evening and said, "There is a man outside who wants to see the chef."

No one had made this request before, and Priya was at once agitated. "Is he an American? Some enemy has sent him here. Sanitary-anitary, health-ealth, they can inspect my kitchens at any time."

"He is an Indian," the Mexican said.

I was alarmed. I thought it was my old employer; that quiet approach was like him. Priya thought it was a rival. Though Priya regularly ate in the restaurants of his rivals he thought it unfair when they came to eat in his. We both went to the door and peeked through the glass window into the dimly lit dining-room.

"Do you know that person, Santosh?"

"Yes, *sahib*."

It wasn't my old employer. It was one of his Bombay friends, a big man in Government, whom I had often served in the chambers. He was by himself and seemed to have just arrived in Washington. He had a new Bombay haircut, very close, and a stiff dark suit,

Bombay tailoring. His shirt looked blue, but in the dim multi-coloured light of the dining-room everything white looked blue. He didn't look unhappy with what he had eaten. Both his elbows were on the curry-spotted tablecloth and he was picking his teeth, half closing his eyes and hiding his mouth with his cupped left hand.

"I don't like him," Priya said. "Still, big man in Government and so on. You must go to him, Santosh."

But I couldn't go.

"Put on your apron, Santosh. And that chef's cap. Prestige. You must go, Santosh."

Priya went out to the dining-room and I heard him say in English that I was coming.

I ran up to my room, put some oil on my hair, combed my hair, put on my best pants and shirt and my shining shoes. It was so, as a man about town rather than as a cook, I went to the dining-room.

The man from Bombay was as astonished as Priya. We exchanged the old courtesies, and I waited. But, to my relief, there seemed little more to say. No difficult questions were put to me; I was grateful to the man from Bombay for his tact. I avoided talk as much as possible. I smiled. The man from Bombay smiled back. Priya smiled uneasily at both of us. So for a while we were, smiling in the dim blue-red light and waiting.

The man from Bombay said to Priya, "Brother, I just have a few words to say to my old friend Santosh."

Priya didn't like it, but he left us.

I waited for those words. But they were not the words I feared. The man from Bombay didn't speak of my old employer. We continued to exchange courtesies. Yes, I was well and he was well and everybody else we knew was well; and I was doing well and he was doing well. That was all. Then, secretively, the man from Bombay gave me a dollar. A dollar, ten rupees, an enormous tip for Bombay. But, from him, much more than a tip: an act of graciousness, part of the sweetness of the old days. Once it would have meant so much to me. Now it meant so little. I was saddened and embarrassed. And I had been anticipating hostility!

Priya was waiting behind the kitchen door. His little face was tight and serious, and I knew he had seen the money pass. Now, quickly, he read my own face, and without saying anything to me he hurried out into the dining-room.

I heard him say in English to the man from Bombay, "Santosh is a good fellow. He's got his own room with bath and everything. I am giving him a hundred dollars a week from next week. A thousand rupees a week. This is a first-class establishment."

A thousand chips a week! I was staggered. It was much more than any man in Government got, and I was sure the man from Bombay was also staggered, and perhaps regretting his good gesture and that precious dollar of foreign exchange.

"Santosh," Priya said, when the restaurant closed that evening, "that man was an enemy. I knew it from the moment I saw him. And because he was an enemy I did something very bad, Santosh."

"Sahib."

"I lied, Santosh. To protect you. I told him, Santosh, that I was going to give you seventy-five dollars a week after Christmas."

"Sahib."

"And now I have to make that lie true. But, Santosh, you know that is money we can't afford. I don't have to tell you about overheads and things like that. Santosh, I will give you sixty."

I said, "Sahib, I couldn't stay on for less than a hundred and twenty-five."

Priya's eyes went shiny and the hollows below his eyes darkened. He giggled and pressed out his lips. At the end of that week I got a hundred dollars. And Priya, good man that he was, bore me no grudge.

Now here was a victory. It was only after it happened that I realized how badly I had needed such a victory, how far, gaining my freedom, I had begun to accept death not as the end but as the goal. I revived. Or rather, my senses revived. But in this city what was there to feed my senses? There were no walks to be taken, no idle conversations with understanding friends. I could buy new

clothes. But then? Would I just look at myself in the mirror? Would I go walking, inviting passers-by to look at me and my clothes? No, the whole business of clothes and dressing up only threw me back into myself.

There was a Swiss or German woman in the cake-shop some doors away, and there was a Filipino woman in the kitchen. They were neither of them attractive, to tell the truth. The Swiss or German could have broken my back with a slap, and the Filipino, though young, was remarkably like one of our older hill women. Still, I felt I owed something to the senses, and I thought I might frolic with these women. But then I was frightened of the responsibility. Goodness, I had learned that a woman is not just a roll and a frolic but a big creature weighing a hundred-and-so-many pounds who is going to be around afterwards.

So the moment of victory passed, without celebration. And it was strange, I thought, that sorrow lasts and can make a man look forward to death, but the mood of victory fills a moment and then is over. When my moment of victory was over I discovered below it, as if waiting for me, all my old sickness and fears: fear of my illegality, my former employer, my presumption, the *hubshi* woman. I saw then that the victory I had had was not something I had worked for, but luck; and that luck was only fate's cheating, giving an illusion of power.

But that illusion lingered, and I became restless. I decided to act, to challenge fate. I decided I would no longer stay in my room and hide. I began to go out walking in the afternoons. I gained courage; every afternoon I walked a little farther. It became my ambition to walk to that green circle with the fountain where, on my first day out in Washington, I had come upon those people in Hindu costumes, like domestics abandoned a long time ago, singing their Sanskrit gibberish and doing their strange Red Indian dance. And one day I got there.

One day I crossed the road to the circle and sat down on a bench. The *hubshi* were there, and the bare feet, and the dancers in saris and the saffron robes. It was mid-afternoon, very hot, and no

one was active. I remembered how magical and inexplicable that circle had seemed to me the first time I saw it. Now it seemed so ordinary and tired: the roads, the motor cars, the shops, the trees, the careful policemen: so much part of the waste and futility that was our world. There was no longer a mystery. I felt I knew where everybody had come from and where those cars were going. But I also felt that everybody there felt like me, and that was soothing. I took to going to the circle every day after the lunch rush and sitting until it was time to go back to Priya's for the dinners.

Late one afternoon, among the dancers and the musicians, the *hubshi* and the bare feet, the singers and the police, I saw her. The *hubshi* woman. And again I wondered at her size; my memory had not exaggerated. I decided to stay where I was. She saw me and smiled. Then, as if remembering anger, she gave me a look of great hatred; and again I saw her as Kali, many-armed, goddess of death and destruction. She looked hard at my face; she considered my clothes. I thought: is it for this I bought these clothes? She got up. She was very big and her tight pants made her much more appalling. She moved towards me. I got up and ran. I ran across the road and then, not looking back, hurried by devious ways to the restaurant.

Priya was doing his accounts. He always looked older when he was doing his accounts, not worried, just older, like a man to whom life could bring no further surprises. I envied him.

"Santosh, some friend brought a parcel for you."

It was a big parcel wrapped in brown paper. He handed it to me, and I thought how calm he was, with his bills and pieces of paper, and the pen with which he made his neat figures, and the book in which he would write every day until that book was exhausted and he would begin a new one.

I took the parcel up to my room and opened it. Inside there was a cardboard box; and inside that, still in its tissue paper, was the green suit.

I felt a hole in my stomach. I couldn't think. I was glad I had to go down almost immediately to the kitchen, glad to be busy until midnight. But then I had to go up to my room again, and I was alone. I hadn't escaped; I had never been free. I had been abandoned. I was like nothing; I had made myself nothing. And I couldn't turn back.

In the morning Priya said, "You don't look very well, Santosh."

His concern weakened me further. He was the only man I could talk to and I didn't know what I could say to him. I felt tears coming to my eyes. At that moment I would have liked the whole world to be reduced to tears. I said, "Sahib, I cannot stay with you any longer."

They were just words, part of my mood, part of my wish for tears and relief. But Priya didn't soften. He didn't even look surprised. "Where will you go, Santosh?"

How could I answer his serious question?

"Will it be different where you go?"

He had freed himself of me. I could no longer think of tears. I said, "Sahib, I have enemies."

He giggled. "You are a joker, Santosh. How can a man like yourself have enemies? There would be no profit in it. *I* have enemies. It is part of your happiness and part of the equity of the world that you cannot have enemies. That's why you can run-run-runaway." He smiled and made the running gesture with his extended palm.

So, at last, I told him my story. I told him about my old employer and my escape and the green suit. He made me feel I was telling him nothing he hadn't already known. I told him about the *hubshi* woman. I was hoping for some rebuke. A rebuke would have meant that he was concerned for my honour, that I could lean on him, that rescue was possible.

But he said, "Santosh, you have no problems. Marry the *hubshi*. That will automatically make you a citizen. Then you will be a free man."

It wasn't what I was expecting. He was asking me to be alone forever. I said, "Sahib, I have a wife and children in the hills at home."

"But this is your home, Santosh. Wife and children in the hills, that is very nice and that is always there. But that is over. You have to do what is best for you here. You are alone here. *Hubshi-ubshi*, nobody worries about that here, if that is your choice. This isn't Bombay. Nobody looks at you when you walk down the street. Nobody cares what you do."

He was right. I was a free man; I could do anything I wanted. I could, if it were possible for me to turn back, go to the apartment and beg my old employer for forgiveness. I could, if it were possible for me to become again what I once was, go to the police and say, "I am an illegal immigrant here. Please deport me to Bombay." I could run away, hang myself, surrender, confess, hide. It didn't matter what I did, because I was alone. And I didn't know what I wanted to do. It was like the time when I felt my senses revive and I wanted to go out and enjoy and I found there was nothing to enjoy.

To be empty is not to be sad. To be empty is to be calm. It is to renounce. Priya said no more to me; he was always busy in the mornings. I left him and went up to my room. It was still a bare room, still like a room that in half an hour could be someone else's. I had never thought of it as mine. I was frightened of its spotless painted walls and had been careful to keep them spotless. For just such a moment.

I tried to think of the particular moment in my life, the particular action, that had brought me to that room. Was it the moment with the *hubshi* woman, or was it when the American came to dinner and insulted my employer? Was it the moment of my escape, my sight of Priya in the gallery, or was it when I looked in the mirror and bought the green suit? Or was it much earlier, in that other life, in Bombay, in the hills? I could find no one moment; every moment seemed important. An endless chain of action had brought me to that room. It was frightening; it was burdensome. It was not a time for new decisions. It was time to call a halt.

I lay on the bed watching the ceiling, watching the sky. The door was pushed open. It was Priya.

"My goodness, Santosh! How long have you been here? You have been so quiet I forgot about you."

He looked about the room. He went into the bathroom and came out again.

"Are you all right, Santosh?"

He sat on the edge of the bed and the longer he stayed the more I realized how glad I was to see him. There was this: when I tried to think of him rushing into the room I couldn't place it in time; it seemed to have occurred only in my mind. He sat with me. Time became real again. I felt a great love for him. Soon I could have laughed at his agitation. And later, indeed, we laughed together.

I said, "Sahib, you must excuse me this morning. I want to go for a walk. I will come back about tea time."

He looked hard at me, and we both knew I had spoken truly.

"Yes, yes, Santosh. You go for a good long walk. Make yourself hungry with walking. You will feel much better."

Walking, through streets that were now so simple to me, I thought how nice it would be if the people in Hindu costumes in the circle were real. Then I might have joined them. We would have taken to the road; at midday we would have halted in the shade of big trees; in the late afternoon the sinking sun would have turned the dust clouds to gold; and every evening at some village there would have been welcome, water, food, a fire in the night. But that was a dream of another life. I had watched the people in the circle long enough to know that they were of their city; that their television life awaited them; that their renunciation was not like mine. No television life awaited me. It didn't matter. In this city I was alone and it didn't matter what I did.

As magical as the circle with the fountain the apartment block had once been to me. Now I saw that it was plain, not very tall, and faced with small white tiles. A glass door; four tiled steps down; the desk to the right, letters and keys in the pigeonholes; a carpet to the left, upholstered chairs, a low table with paper flowers in the vase;

the blue door of the swift, silent elevator. I saw the simplicity of all these things. I knew the floor I wanted. In the corridor, with its illuminated star-decorated ceiling, an imitation sky, the colours were blue, grey and gold. I knew the door I wanted. I knocked.

The *hubshi* woman opened. I saw the apartment where she worked. I had never seen it before and was expecting something like my old employer's apartment, which was on the same floor. Instead, for the first time, I saw something arranged for a television life.

I thought she might have been angry. She looked only puzzled. I was grateful for that.

I said to her in English, "Will you marry me?"

And there, it was done.

"It is for the best, Santosh," Priya said, giving me tea when I got back to the restaurant. "You will be a free man. A citizen. You will have the whole world before you."

I was pleased that he was pleased.

So I am now a citizen, my presence is legal, and I live in Washington. I am still with Priya. We do not talk together as much as we did. The restaurant is one world, the parks and green streets of Washington are another, and every evening some of these streets take me to a third. Burnt-out brick houses, broken fences, overgrown gardens; in a levelled lot between the high brick walls of two houses, a sort of artistic children's playground which the *hubshi* children never use; and then the dark house in which I now live.

Its smells are strange, everything in it is strange. But my strength in this house is that I am a stranger. I have closed my mind and heart to the English language, to newspapers and radio and television, to the pictures of *hubshi* runners and boxers and musicians on the wall. I do not want to understand or learn any more.

I am a simple man who decided to act and see for himself, and it is as though I have had several lives. I do not wish to add to these. Some afternoons I walk to the circle with the fountain. I see the dancers but they are separated from me as by glass. Once, when

there were rumours of new burnings, someone scrawled in white paint on the pavement outside my house: *Soul Brother*. I understand the words; but I feel, brother to what or to whom? I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over.

1971

Endnotes

- Note 1: Servant.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Rainy season.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, a toilet.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Temporarily transferred.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Master (Urdu).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Indian currency, at this time worth ten cents.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Evergreen plant, the leaves of which are chewed in the East with areca-nut parings, as a mild stimulant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: That is, in the Diplomatic Corps.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Derogatory Indian term for Black Africans (Hindustani).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: That is, from the Bata Shoe Company.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Great Hindu deity.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Mixed-race, usually in India, descended from or born to an Indian mother and a European father.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See the 1960s slogan "Black is Beautiful."[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Here, foreigners of Western origin.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Great Hindu deity.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Loincloth (Hindi).[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Emblems.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In India. "Caftan": long loose tunic or shirt (Turkish).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Biryani" and "pillaus": Indian rice dishes.[Return to reference 1](#)

WOLE SOYINKA

b. 1934

When Wole Soyinka received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first Black African to be so honored, he stood at the forefront of a cadre of writers who shaped African literature in English. While Soyinka is primarily known as a playwright, with some thirty dramatic works to his credit, he has also made significant contributions to the genres of prose fiction, poetry, critical essays, and memoir. Throughout this diverse oeuvre, a number of recurring themes and concerns emerge, among them the responsibility borne by the living for past and future generations; the pathologies of political power and authoritarianism; the formation of an African sense of identity based not on an idealized, mythical past but on fundamental truths embedded in indigenous cultures and cosmologies; and the fusion of Western theatrical traditions with subject matter and dramatic techniques rooted in the folklore and religion of the Yoruba people of West Africa.

As related in his autobiographical *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), Soyinka was steeped in both Yoruba and European cultures and modes of thought from his boyhood in Abeokuta, an outpost of the British Empire in southwest Nigeria, roughly equidistant from Lagos and Ibadan. Although his devoutly Anglican parents ranked among the city's social elite, other family members adhered to ancient Yoruba beliefs and practices. Soyinka's secondary education took place at highly selective institutions in Ibadan patterned after

British public schools and similarly oriented toward producing civil servants in the European mold. It was at University College that the aspiring writer acquired a solid grounding in English literature and wrote his first play, featuring a Yoruba boy who longs to visit the College Zoo. His interest in the theater blossomed when he transferred to the University of Leeds, in northern England, at age twenty. After earning his bachelor's degree in English in 1957, Soyinka moved to London, where for the next two years he worked as a play reader for the adventurous Royal Court Theatre. Rubbing shoulders with the "angry young men" of British theater left a lasting influence on his own decidedly avant-garde conception of dramatic language and technique.

The Nigeria to which Soyinka returned in 1959, a few months before Britain formally relinquished its claim to his homeland, was awash in social and political ferment and impatient to turn a new page in its history. Skeptical by nature, Soyinka cast himself in the role of critic and spoiler: his play *A Dance of the Forest* (1960), ostensibly written in celebration of Nigerian independence, satirized the sanitized, feel-good version of Africa's past put forth by its postcolonial leaders. Six decades later he would return to this theme in his novel *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth* (2021), which pillories the self-serving machinations of the ruling class in contemporary Nigeria. Soyinka's outspokenness inevitably brought him into conflict with the authorities. As a consequence of protesting the government's war against the Biafran rebels in 1967, he was detained as a political prisoner for almost two years, an experience that bore fruit in *Poems from Prison* and *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (both 1972). In 1994 he was briefly forced into exile after speaking out against the country's military dictatorship; this is the subject of his memoir *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996).

Despite his long record of political activism, Soyinka eschews overt politicization in his plays and novels. Instead, he positions himself as an exposé of foibles and debunker of myths. In the essay collection *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Soyinka

explored the nature of literary truth, a metaphysical reality that he saw as transcending the mundane factuality of day-to-day living. *Death and the King's Horseman*, written one year earlier, offers a metaphysical perspective on a real-life episode from Nigeria's colonial era in which British authorities prevented the ritual suicide of a horseman to a Yoruba king. Despite this precipitating event, Soyinka's preface to the play discouraged readers from misconstruing it as about "the clash of cultures." He resisted the imposition of such a cliché on his work because it implied that cultures met on equal footing. In fact, British officers had occupied Yoruban soil and imposed their political and cultural norms upon a once autonomous society. The culture clash interpretation also overlooked the core encounter of the play between Elesin, the titular protagonist, and the "universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition."

Death and the King's Horseman (1975) follows a five-act structure that blends aspects of Greek tragedy with the musicality of African drumming and figurative density of Yoruba proverbs. As a play, it continually foregrounds theatricality, role-playing, and performance—of one's duty, of ritual, of another culture, and of gender roles. Elesin is a flawed hero, driven by carnal desire to wed on the very same day that he is expected to commit ritual suicide. The women of the play, particularly Iyaloja, call attention to the impropriety of the decision but are loathe to contradict a man of Elesin's stature. This conflict between sensual pleasure and spiritual duty, internal to the Yoruba community, is interrupted by the officious and culturally obtuse British administrator Simon Pilkings who imprisons Elesin to prevent his suicide. While Pilkings believes he is helping to reform a primitive culture, Soyinka shows how his interference disrupts the cosmic order and thus the play takes its metaphysical turn. For Elesin, ritual suicide is both noble and obligatory: only by sacrificing himself can he ensure that his spirit will be able to accompany his departed master on the path to immortality and prevent him from doing harm to his earthly subjects.

Elesin's son Olunde—who, like Soyinka, has returned to Nigeria after a period of study in Europe—attempts to restore cosmic order, but sets in motion a series of events that play havoc with the sacred transition between life and death.

Death and the King's Horseman

Characters

PRAISE-SINGER¹

ELESIN *Horseman of the King*

IYALOJA *'Mother'² of the market*

SIMON PILKINGS *District Officer*

JANE PILKINGS *his wife*

SERGEANT AMUSA

JOSEPH *houseboy to the Pilkingses*

BRIDE

H.R.H.³ THE PRINCE

THE RESIDENT

AIDE-DE-CAMP⁴

OLUNDE *eldest son of Elesin*

DRUMMERS, WOMEN, YOUNG GIRLS, DANCERS AT THE BALL

The play should run without an interval. For rapid scene changes, one adjustable outline set is very appropriate.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Court poet; serves as a trusted advisor to nobility and is the keeper of historical and ancestral memory. Praise songs are an important oral form of African literature.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Leader of the market women.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: His Royal Highness.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Military officer who assists a senior officer.[Return to reference 4](#)

1

A passage through a market in its closing stages. The stalls are being emptied, mats folded. A few WOMEN pass through on their way home, loaded with baskets. On a cloth-stand, bolts of cloth are taken down, display pieces folded and piled on a tray. ELESIN OBA enters along a passage before the market, pursued by his DRUMMERS and PRAISE-SINGERS. He is a man of enormous vitality, speaks, dances and sings with that infectious enjoyment of life which accompanies all his actions.

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin o! Elesin Oba! Howu!⁵ What tryst is this the cockerel⁶ goes to keep with such haste that he must leave his tail behind?

ELESIN [*slows down a bit, laughing*] A tryst where the cockerel needs no adornment.

PRAISE-SINGER O-oh, you hear that my companions? That's the way the world goes. Because the man approaches a brand-new bride he forgets the long faithful mother of his children.

ELESIN When the horse sniffs the stable does he not strain at the bridle? The market is the long-suffering home of my spirit and the women are packing up to go. That Esu⁷-harassed day slipped into the stewpot while we feasted. We ate it up with the rest of the meat. I have neglected my women.

PRAISE-SINGER We know all that. Still it's no reason for shedding your tail on this day of all days. I know the women will cover you in damask and *alar*⁸ but when the wind blows cold from behind, that's when the fowl knows his true friends.

ELESIN Olohun-iyo!⁹

PRAISE-SINGER Are you sure there will be one like me on the other side?

ELESIN Olohun-iyo!

PRAISE-SINGER Far be it for me to belittle the dwellers of that place but, a man is either born to his art or he isn't. And I don't know for certain that you'll meet my father, so who is going to sing

these deeds in accents that will pierce the deafness of the ancient ones. I have prepared my going—just tell me: Olohun-iyo, I need you on this journey and I shall be behind you.

ELESIN You're like a jealous wife. Stay close to me, but only on this side. My fame, my honour are legacies to the living; stay behind and let the world sip its honey from your lips.

PRAISE-SINGER Your name will be like the sweet berry a child places under his tongue to sweeten the passage of food. The world will never spit it out.

ELESIN Come then. This market is my roost. When I come among the women I am a chicken with a hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose palace is built with tenderness and beauty.

PRAISE-SINGER They love to spoil you but beware. The hands of women also weaken the unwary.

ELESIN This night I'll lay my head upon their lap and go to sleep. This night I'll touch feet with their feet in a dance that is no longer of this earth. But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo¹ on their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breathe as I go to meet my great forebears.

PRAISE-SINGER In their time the world was never tilted from its groove, it shall not be in yours.

ELESIN The gods have said No.

PRAISE-SINGER In their time the great wars came and went, the little wars came and went; the white slavers came and went, they took away the heart of our race, they bore away the mind and muscle of our race.² The city fell and was rebuilt; the city fell and our people trudged through mountain and forest to found a new home³ but—Elesin Oba do you hear me?

ELESIN I hear your voice Olohun-iyo.

PRAISE-SINGER Our world was never wrenched from its true course.

ELESIN The gods have said No.

PRAISE-SINGER There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our

race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void,⁴ whose world will give us shelter?

ELESIN It did not in the time of my forebears, it shall not in mine.

PRAISE-SINGER The cockerel must not be seen without his feathers.

ELESIN Nor will the Not-I bird⁵ be much longer without his nest.

PRAISE-SINGER [*stopped in his lyric stride*] The Not-I bird, Elesin?

ELESIN I said, the Not-I bird.

PRAISE-SINGER All respect to our elders but, is there really such a bird?

ELESIN What! Could it be that he failed to knock on your door?

PRAISE-SINGER [*smiling*] Elesin's riddles are not merely the nut in the kernel⁶ that breaks human teeth; he also buries the kernel in hot embers and dares a man's fingers to draw it out.

ELESIN I am sure he called on you, Olohun-iyó. Did you hide in the loft and push out the servant to tell him you were out?

[ELESIN *executes a brief, half-taunting dance. The DRUMMER moves in and draws a rhythm out of his steps. ELESIN dances towards the market-place as he chants the story of the Not-I bird, his voice changing dexterously to mimic his characters. He performs like a born raconteur, infecting his retinue with his humour and energy. More WOMEN arrive during his recital, including IYALOJA.*]

Death came calling.

Who does not know his rasp of reeds?

A twilight whisper in the leaves before

The great araba⁷ falls? Did you hear it?

Not I! swears the farmer. He snaps

His fingers round his head, abandons

A hard-worn harvest and begins

A rapid dialogue with his legs.

'Not I,' shouts the fearless hunter, 'but—

It's getting dark, and this night-lamp

Has leaked out all its oil. I think

It's best to go home and resume my hunt
Another day.' But now he pauses, suddenly
Lets out a wail: 'Oh foolish mouth, calling
Down a curse on your own head! Your lamp
Has leaked out all its oil, has it?'
Forwards or backwards now he dare not move.
To search for leaves and make *etutu*⁸
On that spot? Or race home to the safety
Of his hearth? Ten market-days⁹ have passed
My friends, and still he's rooted there
Rigid as the plinth of Orayan.¹

The mouth of the courtesan² barely
Opened wide enough to take a ha'penny *robo*³
When she wailed: 'Not I.' All dressed she was
To call upon my friend the Chief Tax Officer.
But now she sends her go-between instead:
'Tell him I'm ill: my period has come suddenly
But not—I hope—my time.'

Why is the pupil crying?
His hapless head was made to taste
The knuckles of my friend the Mallam:⁴
'If you were then reciting the Koran
Would you have ears for idle noises
Darkening the trees, you child of ill omen?'
He shuts down school before its time
Runs home and rings himself with amulets.

And take my good kinsman Ifawomi.
His hands were like a carver's, strong
And true. I saw them
Tremble like wet wings of a fowl
One day he cast his time-smoothed *opele*⁵
Across the divination board.⁶ And all because

The suppliant looked him in the eye and asked,
'Did you hear that whisper in the leaves?'
'Not I,' was his reply; 'perhaps I'm growing deaf—
Good-day.' And Ifa spoke no more that day
The priest locked fast his doors,
Sealed up his leaking roof—but wait!
This sudden care was not for Fawomi⁷
But for Osanyin,⁸ courier-bird of Ifa's
Heart of wisdom. I did not know a kite⁹
Was hovering in the sky
And Ifa now a twittering chicken in
The brood of Fawomi the Mother Hen.

Ah, but I must not forget my evening
Courier from the abundant palm, whose groan
Became Not I, as he constipated down
A wayside bush. He wonders if Elegbara¹
Has tricked his buttocks to discharge
Against a sacred grove. Hear him
Mutter spells to ward off penalties
For an abomination he did not intend.
If any here
Stumbles on a gourd of wine, fermenting
Near the road, and nearby hears a stream
Of spells issuing from a crouching form,
Brother to a *sigidi*,² bring home my wine,
Tell my tapper³ I have ejected
Fear from home and farm. Assure him,
All is well.

PRAISE-SINGER In your time we do not doubt the peace of farmstead
and home, the peace of road and hearth, we do not doubt the
peace of the forest.

ELESIN There was fear in the forest too.
Not-I was lately heard even in the lair

Of beasts. The hyena cackled loud Not I,
The civet⁴ twitched his fiery tail and glared:
Not I. Not-I became the answering-name
Of the restless bird, that little one
Whom Death found nesting in the leaves
When whisper of his coming ran
Before him on the wind. Not-I
Has long abandoned home. This same dawn
I heard him twitter in the gods' abode.
Ah, companions of this living world
What a thing this is, that even those
We call immortal
Should fear to die.

IYALOA But you, husband of multitudes?

ELESIN I, when that Not-I bird perched
Upon my roof, bade him seek his nest again,
Safe, without care or fear. I unrolled
My welcome mat for him to see. Not-I
Flew happily away, you'll hear his voice
No more in this lifetime—You all know
What I am.

PRAISE-SINGER That rock which turns its open lodes
Into the path of lightning. A gay
Thoroughbred whose stride disdains
To falter though an adder⁵ reared
Suddenly in his path.

ELESIN My rein is loosened.
I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes
Watch me dance along the narrowing path
Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.
My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside.

WOMEN You will not delay?

ELESIN Where the storm pleases, and when, it directs
The giants of the forest. When friendship summons
Is when the true comrade goes.

WOMEN Nothing will hold you back?

ELESIN Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet?

I go to keep my friend and master company.
Who says the mouth does not believe in
'No, I have chewed all that before?' I say I have.
The world is not a constant honey-pot.
Where I found little I made do with little.
Where there was plenty I gorged myself.
My master's hands and mine have always
Dipped together and, home or sacred feast,
The bowl was beaten bronze, the meats
So succulent our teeth accused us of neglect.
We shared the choicest of the season's
Harvest of yams. How my friend would read
Desire in my eyes before I knew the cause—
However rare, however precious, it was mine.

WOMEN The town, the very land was yours.

ELESIN The world was mine. Our joint hands
Raised houseposts of trust that withstood
The siege of envy and the termites of time.
But the twilight hour brings bats and rodents—
Shall I yield them cause to foul the rafters?

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Oba! Are you not that man who
Looked out of doors that stormy day
The god of luck⁶ limped by, drenched
To the very lice that held
His rags together? You took pity upon
His sores and wished him fortune.
Fortune was footloose this dawn, he replied,
Till you trapped him in a heartfelt wish
That now returns to you. Elesin Oba!
I say you are that man who
Chanced upon the calabash⁷ of honour
You thought it was palm wine and
Drained its contents to the final drop.

ELESIN Life has an end. A life that will outlive
Fame and friendship begs another name.
What elder takes his tongue to his plate,
Licks it clean of every crumb? He will encounter
Silence when he calls on children to fulfill
The smallest errand! Life is honour.
It ends when honour ends.

WOMEN We know you for a man of honour.

ELESIN Stop! Enough of that!

WOMEN [*puzzled, they whisper among themselves, turning mostly to*
IYALOJA] What is it? Did we say something to give offence? Have
we slighted him in some way?

ELESIN Enough of that sound I say. Let me hear no more in that
vein. I've heard enough.

IYALOJA We must have said something wrong. [*Comes forward a*
little.] Elesin Oba, we ask forgiveness before you speak.

ELESIN I am bitterly offended.

IYALOJA Our unworthiness has betrayed us. All we can do is ask your
forgiveness. Correct us like a kind father.

ELESIN This day of all days . . .

IYALOJA It does not bear thinking. If we offend you now we have
mortified the gods. We offend heaven itself. Father of us all, tell us
where we went astray. [*She kneels, the other women follow.*]

ELESIN Are you not ashamed? Even a tear-veiled
Eye preserves its function of sight.
Because my mind was raised to horizons
Even the boldest man lowers his gaze
In thinking of, must my body here
Be taken for a vagrant's?

IYALOJA Horseman of the King, I am more baffled than ever.

PRAISE-SINGER The strictest father unbends his brow when the child
is penitent, Elesin. When time is short, we do not spend it
prolonging the riddle. Their shoulders are bowed with the weight
of fear lest they have marred your day beyond repair. Speak now
in plain words and let us pursue the ailment to the home of
remedies.

ELESIN Words are cheap. 'We know you for
A man of honour.' Well tell me, is this how
A man of honour should be seen?
Are these not the same clothes in which
I came among you a full half-hour ago?

*[He roars with laughter and the WOMEN, relieved, rise and rush
into stalls to fetch rich cloths.]*

WOMEN The gods are kind. A fault soon remedied is soon forgiven.
Elesin Oba, even as we match our words with deed, let your heart
forgive us completely.

ELESIN You who are breath and giver of my being
How shall I dare refuse you forgiveness
Even if the offence were real.

IYALOJA *[dancing round him. Sings]*
He forgives us. He forgives us.
What a fearful thing it is when
The voyager sets forth
But a curse remains behind.

WOMEN For a while we truly feared
Our hands had wrenched the world adrift
In emptiness.

IYALOJA Richly, richly, robe him richly
The cloth of honour is *alari*
*Sanyan*⁸ is the band of friendship
Boa-skin⁹ makes slippers of esteem

WOMEN For a while we truly feared
Our hands had wrenched the world adrift
In emptiness.

PRAISE-SINGER He who must, must voyage forth
The world will not roll backwards
It is he who must, with one
Great gesture overtake the world.

WOMEN For a while we truly feared
Our hands had wrenched the world

In emptiness.

PRAISE-SINGER The gourd you bear is not for shrieking.

The gourd is not for setting down

At the first crossroad or wayside grove.

Only one river may know its contents

WOMEN We shall all meet at the great market¹

We shall all meet at the great market

He who goes early takes the best bargains

But we shall meet, and resume our banter.

[ELESIN *stands resplendent in rich clothes, cap, shawl, etc. His sash is of a bright red alari cloth. The WOMEN dance round him. Suddenly, his attention is caught by an object off-stage.*]

ELESIN The world I know is good.

WOMEN We know you'll leave it so.

ELESIN The world I know is the bounty

Of hives after bees have swarmed.

No goodness teems with such open hands

Even in the dreams of deities.

WOMEN And we know you'll leave it so.

ELESIN I was born to keep it so. A hive

Is never known to wander. An anthill²

Does not desert its roots. We cannot see

The still great womb of the world—

No man beholds his mother's womb—

Yet who denies it's there? Coiled

To the navel of the world is that

Endless cord that links us all

To the great origin. If I lose my way

The trailing cord will bring me to the roots.

WOMEN The world is in your hands.

[*The earlier distraction, a beautiful YOUNG GIRL, comes along the passage through which ELESIN first made his entry.*]

ELESIN I embrace it. And let me tell you, women—

I like this farewell that the world designed,

Unless my eyes deceive me, unless
We are already parted, the world and I,
And all that breeds desire is lodged
Among our tireless ancestors. Tell me friends,
Am I still earthed in that beloved market
Of my youth? Or could it be my will
Has outleapt the conscious act and I have come
Among the great departed?

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin-Oba why do your eyes roll like a bush-rat who
sees his fate like his father's spirit, mirrored in the eye of a snake?
And all these questions! You're standing on the same earth you've
always stood upon. This voice you hear is mine, Oluhuniyo, not
that of an acolyte³ in heaven.

ELESIN How can that be? In all my life
As Horseman of the King, the juiciest
Fruit on every tree was mine. I saw,
I touched, I wooed, rarely was the answer No.
The honour of my place, the veneration I
Received in the eye of man or woman
Prospered my suit and
Played havoc with my sleeping hours.
And they tell me my eyes were a hawk
In perpetual hunger. Split an iroko⁴ tree
In two, hide a woman's beauty in its heartwood⁵
And seal it up again—Elesin, journeying by,
Would make his camp beside that tree
Of all the shades in the forest.

PRAISE-SINGER Who would deny your reputation, snake-on-the-loose
in dark passages of the market! Bed-bug who wages war on the
mat and receives the thanks of the vanquished! When caught with
his bride's own sister he protested—but I was only prostrating
myself to her as becomes a grateful in-law. Hunter who carries his
powder-horn⁶ on the hips and fires crouching or standing! Warrior
who never makes that excuse of the whining coward—but how
can I go to battle without my trousers?—trouserless or shirtless

it's all one to him. Oka⁷-rearing-from-a-camouflage-of-leaves,
before he strikes the victim is already prone! Once they told him,
Howu, a stallion does not feed on the grass beneath him: he
replied, true, but surely he can roll on it!

WOMEN Ba-a-a-ba O!

PRAISE-SINGER Ah, but listen yet. You know there is the leaf-nibbling
grub and there is the cola-chewing beetle; the leaf-nibbling grub
lives on the leaf, the cola-chewing beetle lives in the colanut.⁸
Don't we know what our man feeds on when we find him
cocooned in a woman's wrapper?

ELESIN Enough, enough, you all have cause
To know me well. But, if you say this earth
Is still the same as gave birth to those songs,
Tell me who was that goddess through whose lips
I saw the ivory pebbles of Oya's⁹ river-bed.
Iyaloja, who is she? I saw her enter
Your stall; all your daughters I know well.
No, not even Ogun¹-of-the-farm toiling
Dawn till dusk on his tuber patch
Not even Ogun with the finest hoe he ever
Forged at the anvil could have shaped
That rise of buttocks, not though he had
The richest earth between his fingers.
Her wrapper was no disguise
For thighs whose ripples shamed the river's
Coils around the hills of Ilesì.² Her eyes
Were new-laid eggs glowing in the dark.
Her skin . . .

IYALOJA Elesin Oba . . .

ELESIN What! Where do you all say I am?

IYALOJA Still among the living.

ELESIN And that radiance which so suddenly
Lit up this market I could boast
I knew so well?

IYALOJA Has one step already in her husband's home. She is betrothed.

ELESIN [*irritated*] Why do you tell me that?

[IYALOJA *falls silent. The WOMEN shuffle uneasily.*]

IYALOJA Not because we dare give you offence Elesin. Today is your day and the whole world is yours. Still, even those who leave town to make a new dwelling elsewhere like to be remembered by what they leave behind.

ELESIN Who does not seek to be remembered?
Memory is Master of Death, the chink
In his armour of conceit. I shall leave
That which makes my going the sheerest
Dream of an afternoon. Should voyagers
Not travel light? Let the considerate traveller
Shed, of his excessive load, all
That may benefit the living.

WOMEN [*relieved*] Ah Elesin Oba, we knew you for a man of honour.

ELESIN Then honour me. I deserve a bed of honour to lie upon.

IYALOJA The best is yours. We know you for a man of honour. You are not one who eats and leaves nothing on his plate for children. Did you not say it yourself? Not one who blights the happiness of others for a moment's pleasure.

ELESIN Who speaks of pleasure? O women, listen!
Pleasure palls. Our acts should have meaning.
The sap of the plantain³ never dries.
You have seen the young shoot swelling
Even as the parent stalk begins to wither.
Women, let my going be likened to
The twilight hour of the plantain.

WOMEN What does he mean Iyaloja? This language is the language of our elders, we do not fully grasp it.

IYALOJA I dare not understand you yet Elesin.

ELESIN All you who stand before the spirit that dares
The opening of the last door of passage,
Dare to rid my going of regrets! My wish

Transcends the blotting out of thought
In one mere moment's tremor of the senses.
Do me credit. And do me honour.
I am girded for the route beyond
Burdens of waste and longing.
Then let me travel light. Let
Seed that will not serve the stomach
On the way remain behind. Let it take root
In the earth of my choice, in this earth
I leave behind.

IYALOJA [*turns to* WOMEN] The voice I hear is already touched by the
waiting fingers of our departed. I dare not refuse.

WOMAN But Iyaloja . . .

IYALOJA The matter is no longer in our hands.

WOMAN But she is betrothed to your own son. Tell him.

IYALOJA My son's wish is mine. I did the asking for him, the loss can
be remedied. But who will remedy the blight of closed hands on
the day when all should be openness and light? Tell him, you say!
You wish that I burden him with knowledge that will sour his wish
and lay regrets on the last moments of his mind. You pray to him
who is your intercessor to the world—don't set this world adrift in
your own time; would you rather it was my hand whose sacrilege⁴
wrenched it loose?

WOMAN Not many men will brave the curse of a dispossessed
husband.

IYALOJA Only the curses of the departed are to be feared. The claims
of one whose foot is on the threshold of their abode surpasses
even the claims of blood. It is impiety even to place hindrances in
their ways.

ELESIN What do my mothers say? Shall I step
Burdened into the unknown?

IYALOJA Not we, but the very earth says No. The sap in the plantain
does not dry. Let grain that will not feed the voyager at his
passage drop here and take root as he steps beyond this earth
and us. Oh you who fill the home from hearth to threshold with

the voices of children, you who now bestride the hidden gulf and pause to draw the right foot across and into the resting-home of the great forebears, it is good that your loins be drained into the earth we know, that your last strength be ploughed back into the womb that gave you being.

PRAISE-SINGER Iyaloja, mother of multitudes in the teeming market of the world, how your wisdom transfigures you!

IYALOJA [*smiling broadly, completely reconciled*] Elesin, even at the narrow end of the passage I know you will look back and sigh a last regret for the flesh that flashed past your spirit in flight. You always had a restless eye. Your choice has my blessing. [*To the WOMEN.*] Take the good news to our daughter and make her ready. [*Some WOMEN go off.*]

ELESIN Your eyes were clouded at first.

IYALOJA Not for long. It is those who stand at the gateway of the great change to whose cry we must pay heed. And then, think of this—it makes the mind tremble. The fruit of such a union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joined spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passage . . . Elesin!

ELESIN I am here. What is it?

IYALOJA Did you hear all I said just now?

ELESIN Yes.

IYALOJA The living must eat and drink. When the moment comes, don't turn the food to rodents' droppings in their mouth. Don't let them taste the ashes of the world when they step out at dawn to breathe the morning dew.

ELESIN This doubt is unworthy of you Iyaloja.

IYALOJA Eating the awusa⁵ nut is not so difficult as drinking water afterwards.

ELESIN The waters of the bitter stream are honey to a man Whose tongue has savoured all.

IYALOJA No one knows when the ants desert their home; they leave the mound intact. The swallow is never seen to peck holes in its

nest when it is time to move with the season. There are always throngs of humanity behind the leave-taker. The rain should not come through the roof for them, the wind must not blow through the walls at night.

ELESIN I refuse to take offence.

IYALOJA You wish to travel light. Well, the earth is yours. But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no curse.

ELESIN You really mistake my person Iyaloja.

IYALOJA I said nothing. Now we must go prepare your bridal chamber. Then these same hands will lay your shrouds.

ELESIN [*exasperated*] Must you be so blunt? [*Recovers.*] Well, weave your shrouds, but let the fingers of my bride seal my eyelids with earth and wash my body.

IYALOJA Prepare yourself Elesin.

[She gets up to leave. At that moment the WOMEN return, leading the BRIDE. ELESIN's face glows with pleasure. He flicks the sleeves of his agbada⁶ with renewed confidence and steps forward to meet the group. As the girl kneels before IYALOJA, lights fade out on the scene.]

Endnotes

- Note 5: Why have you come? (Yoruba). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A young male chicken. "Tryst": a romantic rendezvous. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The Yoruba trickster god; often associated with doubleness, ambivalence, and duplicity. He is also a messenger between the realms of gods and humans. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A rich, woven cloth, brightly coloured [*Soyinka's glossary*]. "Damask": woven patterned fabric with a satiny finish. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Praise-singer. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A deep violet-blue dye obtained from plants; associated with royalty and power. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: A reference to the transatlantic slave trade, which began in Nigeria in the late 15th century (with the complicity of local African rulers), and to the wars between Yoruba kingdoms in the 18th and 19th centuries.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: As it attempted to consolidate its authority in the 16th century, the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo had to rebuild its capital several times.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The space of transition between life and death.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A bird whose chirping sounds as if it is saying “Not I” in Yoruba.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The soft, edible part of a palm nut.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The kapok or silk-cotton tree, cultivated for its cottonlike seed fiber.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Placatory rites or medicine [*Soyinka’s glossary*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Considered the equivalent of one week.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: King Orayan was one of the children of Odudawa, the founder of the Yoruba people. According to Yoruba history, a commemorative obelisk, or plinth, was erected in his honor in Ile-Ife, the Yoruba ancestral home.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The mistress of a wealthy or high-born man.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A delicacy made from crushed melon seeds, fried in tiny balls [*Soyinka’s glossary*]. “Ha’penny”: halfpenny, a low-denomination British coin.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Muslim teacher.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: String of beads used in Ifa divination [*Soyinka’s glossary*]. “Divination”: the art of trying to foretell the future or to discover hidden knowledge through supernatural means.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The carved board on which divination beads are thrown and then interpreted.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Contraction of “Ifawomi,” meaning “Ifa watches over me.” “Ifa”: the Yoruba god of divination.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Patron deity of diviners and medicine men in Yoruba culture.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A bird of prey.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Another name for Esu (see n. 7, p. 865).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A squat, carved figure, endowed with the powers of an incubus [*Soyinka's glossary*]. "Incubus": an imaginary evil spirit that descends on people when they are asleep.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A person whose profession is to tap palm trees for their sap, which is fermented into a wine.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Catlike carnivorous mammal whose glandular secretion is used in making perfume.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Snake.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Possibly another reference to Esu Elegba, the trickster god, who, especially in Caribbean and South American versions, limps because one foot is in the human world and the other in the spiritual world.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Half of a hollow gourd often used to serve food or water.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A richly valued woven cloth [*Soyinka's glossary*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Skin from a large nonvenomous snake that usually kills its victims by constriction and suffocation.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In the afterlife.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A mound of earth formed by a colony of ants in the construction of their underground nests.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An attendant in a religious service.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An African teak, a large tree believed, in Yoruba folklore, to be inhabited by a roguish fairy or spirit.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The heartwood, or inside, of the iroko tree is made up of a variety of colors.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Yoruba hunters carry their gunpowder in the hollowed-out horn of an animal.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Python.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: The caffeinated seed of the cola (kola) nut tree was used as a ritual symbol of welcome.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Goddess of the Niger River, Africa's third-longest waterway, and patron of fishermen and sailors.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: God of iron and war, of hunters, soldiers, and blacksmiths; also considered to be the patron of artists.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A district and town in Oyo, western Nigeria.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A variety of banana, a staple of the tropical regions of Africa.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Disrespect of something held to be sacred.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A climbing plant, also known as Nigerian walnut.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Large flowing robe usually worn by men and often embroidered at the neck and chest.[Return to reference 6](#)

2

The verandah of the District Officer's bungalow.⁷ A tango is playing from an old hand-cranked gramophone and, glimpsed through the wide windows and doors which open onto the forestage verandah are the shapes of SIMON PILKINGS and his wife, JANE, tangoing in and out of shadows in the living-room. They are wearing what is immediately apparent as some form of fancy-dress. The dance goes on for some moments and then the figure of a 'NATIVE ADMINISTRATION' POLICEMAN⁸ emerges and climbs up the steps onto the verandah. He peeps through and observes the dancing couple, reacting with what is obviously a long-standing bewilderment. He stiffens suddenly, his expression changes to one of disbelief and horror. In his excitement he upsets a flowerpot and attracts the attention of the couple. They stop dancing.

PILKINGS Is there anyone out there?

JANE I'll turn off the gramophone.

PILKINGS [*approaching the verandah*] I'm sure I heard something fall over. [*The CONSTABLE retreats slowly, open-mouthed as PILKINGS approaches the verandah.*] Oh it's you Amusa. Why didn't you just knock instead of knocking things over?

AMUSA [*stammers badly and points a shaky finger at his dress*]

Mista Prinkin . . . Mista Prinkin . . .

PILKINGS What is the matter with you?

JANE [*emerging*] Who is it dear? Oh, Amusa . . .

PILKINGS Yes it's Amusa, and acting most strangely.

AMUSA [*his attention now transferred to MRS PILKINGS*] Mammadam . . . you too!

PILKINGS What the hell is the matter with you man!

JANE Your costume darling. Our fancy dress.

PILKINGS Oh hell, I'd forgotten all about that. [*Lifts the face mask over his head showing his face. His wife follows suit.*]

JANE I think you've shocked his big pagan heart bless him.

PILKINGS Nonsense, he's a Moslem. Come on Amusa, you don't believe in all this nonsense do you? I thought you were a good Moslem.

AMUSA Mista Pirinkin, I beg you sir, what you think you do with that dress? It belong to dead cult, not for human being.

PILKINGS Oh Amusa, what a let down you are. I swear by you at the club you know—thank God for Amusa, he doesn't believe in any mumbo-jumbo⁹ And now look at you!

AMUSA Mista Pirinkin, I beg you, take it off. Is not good for man like you to touch that cloth.

PILKINGS Well, I've got it on. And what's more Jane and I have bet on it we're taking first prize at the ball. Now, if you can just pull yourself together and tell me what you wanted to see me about . .

AMUSA Sir, I cannot talk this matter to you in that dress. I no fit.

PILKINGS What's that rubbish again?

JANE He is dead earnest too Simon. I think you'll have to handle this delicately.

PILKINGS Delicately my . . . ! Look here Amusa, I think this little joke has gone far enough hm? Let's have some sense. You seem to forget that you are a police officer in the service of His Majesty's Government. I order you to report your business at once or face disciplinary action.

AMUSA Sir, it is a matter of death. How can man talk against death to person in uniform of death? Is like talking against government to person in uniform of police. Please sir, I go and come back.

PILKINGS [*roars*] Now! [AMUSA *switches his gaze to the ceiling suddenly, remains mute.*]

JANE Oh Amusa, what is there to be scared of in the costume? You saw it confiscated last month from those *egungun*¹ men who were creating trouble in town. You helped arrest the cult leaders yourself—if the juju² didn't harm you at the time how could it possibly harm you now? And merely by looking at it?

AMUSA [*without looking down*] Madam, I arrest the ringleaders who make trouble but me I no touch *egungun*. That *egungun* itself, I

no touch. And I no abuse 'am. I arrest ringleader but I treat *egungun* with respect.

PILKINGS It's hopeless. We'll merely end up missing the best part of the ball. When they get this way there is nothing you can do. It's simply hammering against a brick wall. Write your report or whatever it is on that pad Amusa and take yourself out of here. Come on Jane. We only upset his delicate sensibilities by remaining here.

[AMUSA waits for them to leave, then writes in the notebook, somewhat laboriously. Drumming from the direction of the town wells up. AMUSA listens, makes a movement as if he wants to recall PILKINGS but changes his mind. Completes his note and goes. A few moments later PILKINGS emerges, picks up the pad and reads.]

PILKINGS Jane!

JANE *[from the bedroom]* Coming darling. Nearly ready.

PILKINGS Never mind being ready, just listen to this.

JANE What is it?

PILKINGS Amusa's report. Listen. 'I have to report that it come to my information that one prominent chief, namely, the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom. Because this is criminal offence I await further instruction at charge office. Sergeant Amusa.'

[JANE comes out onto the verandah while he is reading.]

JANE Did I hear you say commit death?

PILKINGS Obviously he means murder.

JANE You mean a ritual murder?

PILKINGS Must be. You think you've stamped it all out but it's always lurking under the surface somewhere.

JANE Oh. Does it mean we are not getting to the ball at all?

PILKINGS No-o. I'll have the man arrested. Everyone remotely involved. In any case there may be nothing to it. Just rumours.

JANE Really? I thought you found Amusa's rumours generally reliable.

PILKINGS That's true enough. But who knows what may have been giving him the scare lately. Look at his conduct tonight.

JANE [*laughing*] You have to admit he had his own peculiar logic. [*Deepens her voice.*] How can man talk against death to person in uniform of death? [*Laughs.*] Anyway, you can't go into the police station dressed like that.

PILKINGS I'll send Joseph with instructions. Damn it, what a confounded nuisance!

JANE But don't you think you should talk first to the man, Simon?

PILKINGS Do you want to go to the ball or not?

JANE Darling, why are you getting rattled? I was only trying to be intelligent. It seems hardly fair just to lock up a man—and a chief at that—simply on the er . . . what is the legal word again?—uncorroborated word of a sergeant.

PILKINGS Well, that's easily decided. Joseph!

JOSEPH [*from within*] Yes master.

PILKINGS You're quite right of course, I am getting rattled. Probably the effect of those bloody drums. Do you hear how they go on and on?

JANE I wondered when you'd notice. Do you suppose it has something to do with this affair?

PILKINGS Who knows? They always find an excuse for making a noise . . . [*Thoughtfully.*] Even so . . .

JANE Yes Simon?

PILKINGS It's different Jane. I don't think I've heard this particular—sound—before. Something unsettling about it.

JANE I thought all bush drumming sounded the same.

PILKINGS Don't tease me now Jane. This may be serious.

JANE I'm sorry. [*Gets up and throws her arms around his neck. Kisses him. The HOUSEBOY enters, retreats and knocks.*]

PILKINGS [*wearily*] Oh, come in Joseph! I don't know where you pick up all these elephantine³ notions of tact. Come over here.

JOSEPH Sir?

PILKINGS Joseph, are you a christian or not?

JOSEPH Yessir.

PILKINGS Does seeing me in this outfit bother you?

JOSEPH No sir, it has no power.

PILKINGS Thank God for some sanity at last. Now Joseph, answer me on the honour of a christian—what is supposed to be going on in town tonight?

JOSEPH Tonight sir? You mean the chief who is going to kill himself?

PILKINGS What?

JANE What do you mean, kill himself?

PILKINGS You do mean he is going to kill somebody don't you?

JOSEPH No master. He will not kill anybody and no one will kill him. He will simply die.

JANE But why Joseph?

JOSEPH It is native law and custom. The King die last month. Tonight is his burial. But before they can bury him, the Elesin must die so as to accompany him to heaven.

PILKINGS I seem to be fated to clash more often with that man than with any of the other chiefs.

JOSEPH He is the King's Chief Horseman.

PILKINGS [*in a resigned way*] I know.

JANE Simon, what's the matter?

PILKINGS It would have to be him!

JANE Who is he?

PILKINGS Don't you remember? He's that chief with whom I had a scrap some three or four years ago. I helped his son get to a medical school in England, remember? He fought tooth and nail to prevent it.

JANE Oh now I remember. He was that very sensitive young man. What was his name again?

PILKINGS Olunde. Haven't replied to his last letter come to think of it. The old pagan wanted him to stay and carry on some family tradition or the other. Honestly I couldn't understand the fuss he made. I literally had to help the boy escape from close confinement and load him onto the next boat. A most intelligent boy, really bright.

JANE I rather thought he was much too sensitive you know. The kind of person you feel should be a poet munching rose petals in

Bloomsbury.⁴

PILKINGS Well, he's going to make a first-class doctor. His mind is set on that. And as long as he wants my help he is welcome to it.

JANE [*after a pause*] Simon.

PILKINGS Yes?

JANE This boy, he was the eldest son wasn't he?

PILKINGS I'm not sure. Who could tell with that old ram?

JANE Do you know, Joseph?

JOSEPH Oh yes madam. He was the eldest son. That's why Elesin cursed master good and proper. The eldest son is not supposed to travel away from the land.

JANE [*giggling*] Is that true Simon? Did he really curse you good and proper?

PILKINGS By all accounts I should be dead by now.

JOSEPH Oh no, master is white man. And good christian. Black man juju can't touch master.

JANE If he was his eldest, it means that he would be the Elesin to the next king. It's a family thing isn't it Joseph?

JOSEPH Yes madam. And if this Elesin had died before the King, his eldest son must take his place.

JANE That would explain why the old chief was so mad you took the boy away.

PILKINGS Well it makes me all the more happy I did.

JANE I wonder if he knew.

PILKINGS Who? Oh, you mean Olunde?

JANE Yes. Was that why he was so determined to get away? I wouldn't stay if I knew I was trapped in such a horrible custom.

PILKINGS [*thoughtfully*] No, I don't think he knew. At least he gave no indication. But you couldn't really tell with him. He was rather close you know, quite unlike most of them. Didn't give much away, not even to me.

JANE Aren't they all rather close, Simon?

PILKINGS These natives here? Good gracious. They'll open their mouths and yap with you about their family secrets before you can stop them. Only the other day . . .

JANE But Simon, do they really give anything away? I mean, anything that really counts. This affair for instance, we didn't know they still practised that custom did we?

PILKINGS Ye-e-es, I suppose you're right there. Sly, devious bastards.

JOSEPH [*stiffly*] Can I go now master? I have to clean the kitchen.

PILKINGS What? Oh, you can go. Forgot you were still there.

[JOSEPH *goes.*]

JANE Simon, you really must watch your language. Bastard isn't just a simple swear-word in these parts, you know.

PILKINGS Look, just when did you become a social anthropologist, that's what I'd like to know.

JANE I'm not claiming to know anything. I just happen to have overheard quarrels among the servants. That's how I know they consider it a smear.

PILKINGS I thought the extended family system⁵ took care of all that. Elastic family, no bastards.

JANE [*shrugs*] Have it your own way.

[*Awkward silence. The drumming increases in volume. JANE gets up suddenly, restless.*]

That drumming Simon, do you think it might really be connected with this ritual? It's been going on all evening.

PILKINGS Let's ask our native guide. Joseph! Just a minute Joseph.

[JOSEPH *re-enters.*] What's the drumming about?

JOSEPH I don't know master.

PILKINGS What do you mean you don't know? It's only two years since your conversion. Don't tell me all that holy water nonsense also wiped out your tribal memory.

JOSEPH [*visibly shocked*] Master!

JANE Now you've done it.

PILKINGS What have I done now?

JANE Never mind. Listen Joseph, just tell me this. Is that drumming connected with dying or anything of that nature?

JOSEPH Madam, this is what I am trying to say: I am not sure. It sounds like the death of a great chief and then, it sounds like the wedding of a great chief. It really mix me up.

PILKINGS Oh get back to the kitchen. A fat lot of help you are.

JOSEPH Yes master. [*Goes.*]

JANE Simon . . .

PILKINGS Alright, alright. I'm in no mood for preaching.

JANE It isn't my preaching you have to worry about, it's the preaching of the missionaries who preceded you here. When they make converts they really convert them. Calling holy water nonsense to our Joseph is really like insulting the Virgin Mary before a Roman Catholic. He's going to hand in his notice tomorrow you mark my word.

PILKINGS Now you're being ridiculous.

JANE Am I? What are you willing to bet that tomorrow we are going to be without a steward-boy?⁶ Did you see his face?

PILKINGS I am more concerned about whether or not we will be one native chief short by tomorrow. Christ! Just listen to those drums. [*He strides up and down, undecided.*]

JANE [*getting up*] I'll change and make us some supper.

PILKINGS What's that?

JANE Simon, it's obvious we have to miss this ball.

PILKINGS Nonsense. It's the first bit of real fun the European club⁷ has managed to organise for over a year, I'm damned if I'm going to miss it. And it is a rather special occasion. Doesn't happen every day.

JANE You know this business has to be stopped Simon. And you are the only man who can do it.

PILKINGS I don't have to stop anything. If they want to throw themselves off the top of a cliff or poison themselves for the sake of some barbaric custom what is that to me? If it were ritual murder or something like that I'd be duty-bound to do something. I can't keep an eye on all the potential suicides in this province. And as for that man—believe me it's good riddance.

JANE [*laughs*] I know you better than that Simon. You are going to have to do something to stop it—after you’ve finished blustering.

PILKINGS [*shouts after her*] And suppose after all it’s only a wedding. I’d look a proper fool if I interrupted a chief on his honeymoon, wouldn’t I? [*Resumes his angry stride, slows down.*] Ah well, who can tell what those chiefs actually do on their honeymoon anyway? [*He takes up the pad and scribbles rapidly on it.*] Joseph! Joseph! Joseph! [*Some moments later JOSEPH puts in a sulky appearance.*] Did you hear me call you? Why the hell didn’t you answer?

JOSEPH I didn’t hear master.

PILKINGS You didn’t hear me! How come you are here then?

JOSEPH [*stubbornly*] I didn’t hear master.

PILKINGS [*controls himself with an effort*] We’ll talk about it in the morning. I want you to take this note directly to Sergeant Amusa. You’ll find him at the charge office.⁸ Get on your bicycle and race there with it. I expect you back in twenty minutes exactly. Twenty minutes, is that clear?

JOSEPH Yes master. [*Going.*]

PILKINGS Oh er . . . Joseph.

JOSEPH Yes master?

PILKINGS [*between gritted teeth*] Er . . . forget what I said just now. The holy water is not nonsense. I was talking nonsense.

JOSEPH Yes master. [*Goes.*]

JANE [*pokes her head round the door*] Have you found him?

PILKINGS Found who?

JANE Joseph. Weren’t you shouting for him?

PILKINGS Oh yes, he turned up finally.

JANE You sounded desperate. What was it all about?

PILKINGS Oh nothing. I just wanted to apologise to him. Assure him that the holy water isn’t really nonsense.

JANE Oh? And how did he take it?

PILKINGS Who the hell gives a damn! I had a sudden vision of our Very Reverend Macfarlane drafting another letter of complaint to

the Resident about my unchristian language towards his parishioners.

JANE Oh I think he's given up on you by now.

PILKINGS Don't be too sure. And anyway, I wanted to make sure Joseph didn't 'lose' my note on the way. He looked sufficiently full of the holy crusade to do some such thing.

JANE If you've finished exaggerating, come and have something to eat.

PILKINGS No, put it all away. We can still get to the ball.

JANE Simon . . .

PILKINGS Get your costume back on. Nothing to worry about. I've instructed Amusa to arrest the man and lock him up.

JANE But that station is hardly secure Simon. He'll soon get his friends to help him escape.

PILKINGS A-ah, that's where I have out-thought you. I'm not having him put in the station cell. Amusa will bring him right here and lock him up in my study. And he'll stay with him till we get back. No one will dare come here to incite him to anything.

JANE How clever of you darling. I'll get ready.

PILKINGS Hey.

JANE Yes darling.

PILKINGS I have a surprise for you. I was going to keep it until we actually got to the ball.

JANE What is it?

PILKINGS You know the Prince is on a tour of the colonies don't you? Well, he docked in the capital only this morning but he is already at the Residency.⁹ He is going to grace the ball with his presence later tonight.

JANE Simon! Not really.

PILKINGS Yes he is. He's been invited to give away the prizes and he has agreed. You must admit old Engleton is the best Club Secretary we ever had. Quick off the mark that lad.

JANE But how thrilling.

PILKINGS The other provincials are going to be damned envious.

JANE I wonder what he'll come as.

PILKINGS Oh I don't know. As a coat-of-arms¹ perhaps. Anyway it won't be anything to touch this.

JANE Well that's lucky. If we are to be presented I won't have to start looking for a pair of gloves. It's all sewn on.

PILKINGS [*laughing*] Quite right. Trust a woman to think of that. Come on, let's get going.

JANE [*rushing off*] Won't be a second. [*Stops.*] Now I see why you've been so edgy all evening. I thought you weren't handling this affair with your usual brilliance—to begin with that is.

PILKINGS [*his mood is much improved*] Shut up woman and get your things on.

JANE Alright boss, coming.

[PILKINGS *suddenly begins to hum the tango to which they were dancing before. Starts to execute a few practice steps. Lights fade.*]

Endnotes

- Note 7: A one-story house generally surrounded by a “verandah,” a large covered porch, favored by colonial officials as a protection against the tropical heat. Both words are of Indian (Hindi) origin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A policeman belonging to a unit charged with the policing of Africans and considered inferior to the regular police.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An object of superstitious veneration. The term may derive from a West African word for a masked male dancer in religious ceremonies.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Ancestral masquerade [*Soyinka's glossary*]. The masked figures in the masquerade embody the reincarnated spirits of ancestors; they appear at traditional celebrations, festivals, and funerals, and bridge the world of the living and the dead.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Magic, usually associated with an object like an amulet or charm.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Ponderous or clumsy.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A fashionable district in central London associated with literature, art, and high culture.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The domestic system in which the distinction between the nuclear family and other relatives is not strictly maintained.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A domestic servant.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A club reserved for Europeans.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The office in a police station where the names of criminal suspects are recorded.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The governor's official residence.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Crest.[Return to reference 1](#)

3

A swelling, agitated hum of women's voices rises immediately in the background. The lights come on and we see the frontage of a converted cloth stall in the market. The floor leading up to the entrance is covered in rich velvets and woven cloth. The WOMEN come on stage, borne backwards by the determined progress of Sergeant AMUSA and his two CONSTABLES who already have their batons out and use them as a pressure against the WOMEN. At the edge of the cloth-covered floor however the WOMEN take a determined stand and block all further progress of the men. They begin to tease them mercilessly.

AMUSA I am tell you women for last time to commot my road.² I am here on official business.

WOMAN Official business you white man's eunuch? Official business is taking place where you want to go and it's a business you wouldn't understand.

WOMAN [*makes a quick tug at the CONSTABLE's baton*] That doesn't fool anyone you know. It's the one you carry under your government knickers³ that counts. [*She bends low as if to peep under the baggy shorts. The embarrassed CONSTABLE quickly puts his knees together. The WOMEN roar.*]

WOMAN You mean there is nothing there at all?

WOMAN Oh there was something. You know that handbell which the whiteman uses to summon his servants . . . ?

AMUSA [*he manages to preserve some dignity throughout*] I hope you women know that interfering with officer in execution of his duty is criminal offence.

WOMAN Interfere? He says we're interfering with him. You foolish man we're telling you there's nothing to interfere with.

AMUSA I am order you now to clear the road.

WOMAN What road? The one your father built?

WOMAN You are a Policeman not so? Then you know what they call trespassing in court. Or—[*Pointing to the cloth-lined steps*—do

you think that kind of road is built for every kind of feet.

WOMAN Go back and tell the white man who sent you to come himself.

AMUSA If I go I will come back with reinforcement. And we will all return carrying weapons.

WOMAN Oh, now I understand. Before they can put on those knickers the white man first cuts off their weapons.

WOMAN What a cheek! You mean you come here to show power to women and you don't even have a weapon.

AMUSA [*shouting above the laughter*] For the last time I warn you women to clear the road.

WOMAN To where?

AMUSA To that hut. I know he dey dere.

WOMAN Who?

AMUSA The chief who call himself Elesin Oba.

WOMAN You ignorant man. It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it. As it called out to his father before him and will to his son after him. And that is in spite of everything your white man can do.

WOMAN Is it not the same ocean that washes this land and the white man's land? Tell your white man he can hide our son away as long as he likes. When the time comes for him, the same ocean will bring him back.

AMUSA The government say dat kin' ting⁴ must stop.

WOMAN Who will stop it? You? Tonight our husband and father will prove himself greater than the laws of strangers.

AMUSA I tell you nobody go prove anyting tonight or anytime. Is ignorant and criminal to prove dat kin' prove.

IYALOJA [*entering, from the hut. She is accompanied by a group of YOUNG GIRLS who have been attending the BRIDE*] What is it Amusa? Why do you come here to disturb the happiness of others.

AMUSA Madame Iyaloja, I glad you come. You know me, I no like trouble but duty is duty. I am here to arrest Elesin for criminal intent. Tell these women to stop obstructing me in the performance of my duty.

IYALOJA And you? What gives you the right to obstruct our leader of men in the performance of his duty?

AMUSA What kin' duty be dat one Iyaloja.

IYALOJA What kin' duty? What kin' duty does a man have to his new bride?

AMUSA [*bewildered, looks at the WOMEN and at the entrance to the hut*] Iyaloja, is it wedding you call dis kin' ting?

IYALOJA You have wives haven't you? Whatever the white man has done to you he hasn't stopped you having wives. And if he has, at least he is married. If you don't know what a marriage is, go and ask him to tell you.

AMUSA This no to wedding.

IYALOJA And ask him at the same time what he would have done if anyone had come to disturb him on his wedding night.

AMUSA Iyaloja, I say dis no to wedding.

IYALOJA You want to look inside the bridal chamber? You want to see for yourself how a man cuts the virgin knot?⁵

AMUSA Madam . . .

WOMAN Perhaps his wives are still waiting for him to learn.

AMUSA Iyaloja, make you tell dese women make den no insult me again. If I hear dat kin' insult once more . . .

GIRL [*pushing her way through*] You will do what?

GIRL He's out of his mind. It's our mothers you're talking to, do you know that? Not to any illiterate villager you can bully and terrorise. How dare you intrude here anyway?

GIRL What a cheek, what impertinence!

GIRL You've treated them too gently. Now let them see what it is to tamper with the mothers of this market.

GIRL Your betters dare not enter the market when the women say no!

GIRL Haven't you learnt that yet, you jester in khaki and starch?

IYALOJA Daughters . . .

GIRL No no Iyaloja, leave us to deal with him. He no longer knows his mother, we'll teach him.

[*With a sudden movement they snatch the batons of the two*
CONSTABLES. *They begin to hem them in.*]

GIRL What next? We have your batons? What next? What are you going to do?

[*With equally swift movements they knock off their hats.*]

GIRL Move if you dare. We have your hats, what will you do about it? Didn't the white man teach you to take off your hats before women?

IYALOJA It's a wedding night. It's a night of joy for us. Peace . . .

GIRL Not for him. Who asked him here?

GIRL Does he dare go to the Residency without an invitation?

GIRL Not even where the servants eat the left-overs.

GIRL [*in turn. In an 'English' accent*] Well well it's Mister Amusa. Were you invited? [*Play-acting to one another. The older WOMEN encourage them with their titters.*]

—Your invitation card please?

—Who are you? Have we been introduced?

—And who did you say you were?

—Sorry, I didn't quite catch your name.

—May I take your hat?

—If you insist. May I take yours? [*Exchanging the POLICEMEN'S hats.*]

—How very kind of you.

—Not at all. Won't you sit down?

—After you.

—Oh no.

—I insist.

—You're most gracious.

—And how do you find the place?

—The natives are alright.

—Friendly?

—Tractable.

—Not a teeny-weeny bit restless?

—Well, a teeny-weeny bit restless.

—One might even say, difficult?

—Indeed one might be tempted to say, difficult.
—But you do manage to cope?
—Yes indeed I do. I have a rather faithful ox called Amusa.
—He's loyal?
—Absolutely.
—Lay down his life for you what?
—Without a moment's thought.
—Had one like that once. Trust him with my life.
—Mostly of course they are liars.
—Never known a native to tell the truth.
—Does it get rather close around here?
—It's mild for this time of the year.
—But the rains may still come.
—They are late this year aren't they?
—They are keeping African time.
—Ha ha ha ha
—Ha ha ha ha
—The humidity is what gets me.
—It used to be whisky.
—Ha ha ha ha
—Ha ha ha ha
—What's your handicap⁶ old chap?
—Is there racing by golly?
—Splendid golf course, you'll like it.
—I'm beginning to like it already.
—And a European club, exclusive.
—You've kept the flag flying.
—We do our best for the old country.
—It's a pleasure to serve.
—Another whisky old chap?
—You are indeed too too kind.
—Not at all sir. Where is that boy? [*With a sudden bellow.*]
Sergeant!
AMUSA [*snaps to attention*] Yessir!

[*The WOMEN collapse with laughter.*]

GIRL Take your men out of here.

AMUSA [*realising the trick, he rages from loss of face*] I'm give you warning . . .

GIRL Alright then. Off with his knickers! [*They surge slowly forward.*]

IYALOJA Daughters, please.

AMUSA [*squaring himself for defence*] The first woman wey touch me . . .

IYALOJA My children, I beg of you . . .

GIRL Then tell him to leave this market. This is the home of our mothers. We don't want the eater of white left-overs at the feast their hands have prepared.

IYALOJA You heard them Amusa. You had better go.

GIRL Now!

AMUSA [*commencing his retreat*] We dey go now, but make you no say we no warn you.

GIRL Now!

GIRL Before we read the riot act—you should know all about that.

AMUSA Make we go. [*They depart, more precipitately.*]

[*The WOMEN strike their palms across in the gesture of wonder.*]

WOMEN Do they teach you all that at school?

WOMAN And to think I nearly kept Apinke away from the place.

WOMAN Did you hear them? Did you see how they mimicked the white man?

WOMAN The voices exactly. Hey, there are wonders in this world!

IYALOJA Well, our elders have said it: Dada may be weak, but he has a younger sibling who is truly fearless.⁷

WOMAN The next time the white man shows his face in this market I will set Wuraola⁸ on his tail.

[*A WOMAN bursts into song and dance of euphoria—Tani l'awa o l'ogbeja? Kayi! A l'ogbeja. Omo Kekere l'ogbeja.*⁹ *The rest of the WOMEN join in, some placing the GIRLS on their back like infants, others dancing round them. The dance becomes*

general, mounting in excitement. ELESIN appears, in wrapper only. In his hands a white velvet cloth folded loosely as if it held some delicate object. He cries out.]

ELESIN Oh you mothers of beautiful brides! [*The dancing stops. They turn and see him, and the object in his hands. IYALOJA approaches and gently takes the cloth from him.*] Take it. It is no mere virgin stain, but the union of life and the seeds of passage. My vital flow, the last from this flesh is intermingled with the promise of future life. All is prepared. Listen! [*A steady drum-beat from the distance.*] Yes. It is nearly time. The King's dog has been killed. The King's favourite horse is about to follow his master. My brother chiefs know their task and perform it well. [*He listens again.*]

[*The BRIDE emerges, stands shyly by the door. He turns to her.*]

Our marriage is not yet wholly fulfilled. When earth and passage wed, the consummation is complete only when there are grains of earth on the eyelids of passage. Stay by me till then. My faithful drummers, do me your last service. This is where I have chosen to do my leave-taking, in this heart of life, this hive which contains the swarm of the world in its small compass. This is where I have known love and laughter away from the palace. Even the richest food cloy¹ when eaten days on end; in the market, nothing ever cloy. Listen. [*They listen to the drums.*] They have begun to seek out the heart of the King's favourite horse. Soon it will ride in its bolt of raffia² with the dog at its feet. Together they will ride on the shoulders of the King's grooms through the pulse centres of the town. They know it is here I shall await them. I have told them. [*His eyes appear to cloud. He passes his hand over them as if to clear his sight. He gives a faint smile.*] It promises well; just then I felt my spirit's eagerness. The kite makes for wide spaces and the wind creeps up behind its tail; can the kite say less than—thank you, the quicker the better? But wait a while my spirit. Wait.

Wait for the coming of the courier of the King. Do you know, friends, the horse is born to this one destiny, to bear the burden that is man upon its back. Except for this night, this night alone when the spotless stallion will ride in triumph on the back of man. In the time of my father I witnessed the strange sight. Perhaps tonight also I shall see it for the last time. If they arrive before the drums beat for me, I shall tell them to let the Alafin³ know I follow swiftly. If they come after the drums have sounded, why then, all is well for I have gone ahead. Our spirits shall fall in step along the great passage. [*He listens to the drums. He seems again to be falling into a state of semi-hypnosis; his eyes scan the sky but it is in a kind of daze. His voice is a little breathless.*] The moon has fed, a glow from its full stomach fills the sky and air, but I cannot tell where is that gateway through which I must pass. My faithful friends, let our feet touch together this last time, lead me into the other market with sounds that cover my skin with down yet make my limbs strike earth like a thoroughbred. Dear mothers, let me dance into the passage even as I have lived beneath your roofs. [*He comes down progressively among them. They make way for him, the DRUMMERS playing. His dance is one of solemn, regal motions, each gesture of the body is made with a solemn finality. The WOMEN join him, their steps a somewhat more fluid version of his. Beneath the PRAISE-SINGER's exhortations the women dirge 'Alẹlẹlẹ, awo mi lọ.*⁴]

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Alfain, can you hear my voice?

ELESIN Faintly, my friend, faintly.

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Alafin, can you hear my call?

ELESIN Faintly my king, faintly.

PRAISE-SINGER Is your memory sound Elesin?

 Shall my voice be a blade of grass and
 Tickle the armpit of the past?

ELESIN My memory needs no prodding but

 What do you wish to say to me?

PRAISE-SINGER Only what has been spoken. Only what concerns

The dying wish of the father of all.

ELESIN It is buried like seed-yam in my mind.

This is the season of quick rains, the harvest
Is this moment due for gathering.

PRAISE-SINGER If you cannot come, I said, swear
You'll tell my favourite horse. I shall
Ride on through the gates alone.

ELESIN Elesin's message will be read
Only when his loyal heart no longer beats.

PRAISE-SINGER If you cannot come Elesin, tell my dog.
I cannot stay the keeper too long
At the gate.

ELESIN A dog does not outrun the hand
That feeds it meat. A horse that throws its rider
Slows down to a stop. Elesin Alafin
Trusts no beasts with messages between
A king and his companion.

PRAISE-SINGER If you get lost my dog will track
The hidden path to me.

ELESIN The seven-way crossroads⁵ confuses
Only the stranger. The Horseman of the King
Was born in the recesses of the house.

PRAISE-SINGER I know the wickedness of men. If there is
Weight on the loose end of your sash, such weight
As no mere man can shift; if your sash is earthed
By evil minds who mean to part us at the last . . .

ELESIN My sash is of the deep purple *alari*;
It is no tethering-rope. The elephant
Trails no tethering-rope; that king
Is not yet crowned who will peg an elephant—
Not even you my friend and King.

PRAISE-SINGER And yet this fear will not depart from me
The darkness of this new abode is deep—
Will your human eyes suffice?

ELESIN In a night which falls before our eyes

However deep, we do not miss our way.

PRAISE-SINGER Shall I now not acknowledge I have stood
Where wonders met their end? The elephant deserves
Better than that we say 'I have caught
A glimpse of something'. If we see the tamer
Of the forest let us say plainly, we have seen
An elephant.

ELESIN [*his voice is drowsy*]

I have freed myself of earth and now
It's getting dark. Strange voices guide my feet.

PRAISE-SINGER The river is never so high that the eyes
Of a fish are covered. The night is not so dark
That the albino⁶ fails to find his way. A child
Returning homewards craves no leading by the hand.
Gracefully does the mask regain his grove at the end of the day .

. .

Gracefully. Gracefully does the mask dance
Homeward at the end of the day, gracefully . . .

[ELESIN's *trance*⁷ appears to be deepening, his steps heavier.]

IYALOJA It is the death of war that kills the valiant,
Death of water is how the swimmer goes
It is the death of markets that kills the trader
And death of indecision takes the idle away
The trade of the cutlass blunts its edge
And the beautiful die the death of beauty.
It takes an Elesin to die the death of death . . .
Only Elesin . . . dies the unknowable death of death . . .
Gracefully, gracefully does the horseman regain
The stables at the end of day, gracefully . . .

PRAISE-SINGER How shall I tell what my eyes have seen? The
Horseman gallops on before the courier, how shall I tell what my
eyes have seen? He says a dog may be confused by new scents of
beings he never dreamt of, so he must precede the dog to
heaven. He says a horse may stumble on strange boulders and be

lamed, so he races on before the horse to heaven. It is best, he says, to trust no messenger who may falter at the outer gate; oh how shall I tell what my ears have heard? But do you hear me still Elesin, do you hear your faithful one?

[ELESIN in his motions appears to feel for a direction of sound, subtly, but he only sinks deeper into his trance-dance.]

Elesin Alafin, I no longer sense your flesh. The drums are changing now but you have gone far ahead of the world. It is not yet noon in heaven; let those who claim it is begin their own journey home. So why must you rush like an impatient bride: why do you race to desert your Olohun-iyo?

[ELESIN is now sunk fully deep in his trance, there is no longer sign of any awareness of his surroundings.]

Does the deep voice of *gbedu*⁸ cover you then, like the passage of royal elephants? Those drums that brook no rivals, have they blocked the passage to your ears that my voice passes into wind, a mere leaf floating in the night? Is your flesh lightened Elesin, is that lump of earth I slid between your slippers to keep you longer slowly sifting from your feet? Are the drums on the other side now tuning skin to skin with ours in *osugbo*?⁹ Are there sounds there I cannot hear, do footsteps surround you which pound the earth like *gbedu*, roll like thunder round the dome of the world? Is the darkness gathering in your head Elesin? Is there now a streak of light at the end of the passage, a light I dare not look upon? Does it reveal whose voices we often heard, whose touches we often felt, whose wisdoms come suddenly into the mind when the wisest have shaken their heads and murmured; It cannot be done? Elesin Alafin, don't think I do not know why your lips are heavy, why your limbs are drowsy as palm oil in the cold of harmattan.¹ I would call you back but when the elephant heads for the jungle, the tail is too small a handhold for the hunter that would pull him back. The sun that heads for the sea no longer heeds the prayers of the farmer. When the river begins to taste the salt of the ocean, we

no longer know what deity to call on, the river-god or Olokun.² No arrow flies back to the string, the child does not return through the same passage that gave it birth. Elesin Oba, can you hear me at all? Your eyelids are glazed like a courtesan's, is it that you see the dark groom and master of life? And will you see my father? Will you tell him that I stayed with you to the last? Will my voice ring in your ears awhile, will you remember Olohun-iyo even if the music on the other side surpasses his mortal craft? But will they know you over there? Have they eyes to gauge your worth, have they the heart to love you, will they know what thoroughbred prances towards them in caparisons of honour? If they do not Elesin, if any there cuts your yam with a small knife, or pours you wine in a small calabash, turn back and return to welcoming hands. If the world were not greater than the wishes of Olohun-iyo, I would not let you go . . .

[He appears to break down. ELESIN dances on, completely in a trance. The dirge wells up louder and stronger. ELESIN's dance does not lose its elasticity but his gestures become, if possible, even more weighty. Lights fade slowly on the scene.]

Endnotes

- Note 2: Get out of my way; literally translated from pidgin English as "come out of my road."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Women's underwear. The reference here is to the khaki shorts won by colonial policemen.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: That kind of thing (pidgin English).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The hymen.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In sports, an advantage given to a less competitive player to level the playing field.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Dada, the mythical king of Oyo and patron god of newborns, is reputed to have abdicated in favor of his fierce younger brother Shango, the god of thunder and lightning in the Yoruba pantheon.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Rich Gold (Yoruba), a common name for a girl.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Who says we haven't a defender? Silence! We have our defenders. Little children are our champions [*Soyinka's translation*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Becomes uninteresting or distasteful.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The fiber from raffia palms, used in making skirts for ceremonial masks.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: King or emperor of Oyo.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Night has fallen, the seasoned initiate is leaving.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In Yoruba cosmology, Esu Elegba, the god of confusion and doubleness, is often found at the crossroads.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A person with pale skin resulting from a lack of melanin pigmentation.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A hypnotic condition; in another sense, the word refers to a passageway.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A deep-timbred royal drum [*Soyinka's glossary*].[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Secret 'executive' cult of the Yoruba; its meeting place [*Soyinka's glossary*].[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In West Africa, a dry breeze blows from November to March and carries dust from the Sahara Desert.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: God of the ocean, worshiped by fishermen and sailors.[Return to reference 2](#)

A Masque.³ The front side of the stage is part of a wide corridor around the great hall of the Residency extending beyond vision into the rear and wings. It is redolent of the tawdry decadence of a far-flung but key imperial frontier. The couples in a variety of fancy-dress are ranged around the walls, gazing in the same direction. The guest-of-honour is about to make an appearance. A portion of the local police brass band with its white conductor is just visible. At last, the entrance of Royalty. The band plays 'Rule Britannia',⁴ badly, beginning long before he is visible. The couples bow and curtsy as he passes by them. Both he and his companions are dressed in seventeenth-century European costume. Following behind are the RESIDENT and his partner similarly attired. As they gain the end of the hall where the orchestra dais begins the music comes to an end. The PRINCE bows to the guests. The band strikes up a Viennese waltz and the PRINCE formally opens the floor. Several bars later the RESIDENT and his companion follow suit. Others follow in appropriate pecking order. The orchestra's waltz rendition is not of the highest musical standard.

Some time later the PRINCE dances again into view and is settled into a corner by the RESIDENT who then proceeds to select couples as they dance past for introduction, sometimes threading his way through the dancers to tap the lucky couple on the shoulder. Desperate efforts from many to ensure that they are recognised in spite of, perhaps, their costume. The ritual of introductions soon takes in PILKINGS and his wife. The PRINCE is quite fascinated by their costume and they demonstrate the adaptations they have made to it, pulling down the mask to demonstrate how the egungun normally appears, then showing the various press-button controls they have innovated for the face flaps, the sleeves, etc. They demonstrate the dance steps and the guttural⁵ sounds made by the egungun, harass other dancers in the hall, MRS PILKINGS playing the 'restrainer'⁶ to PILKINGS 'manic darts. Everyone is highly entertained, the Royal Party especially who lead the applause.

At this point a liveried⁷ footman comes in with a note on a salver⁸ and is intercepted almost absent-mindedly by the RESIDENT who takes the note and reads it. After polite coughs he succeeds in excusing the PILKINGS from the PRINCE and takes them aside. The PRINCE considerably offers the RESIDENT's wife his hand and dancing is resumed.

On their way out the RESIDENT gives an order to his AIDE-DE-CAMP.⁹ They come into the side corridor where the RESIDENT hands the note to PILKINGS.

RESIDENT As you see it says 'emergency' on the outside. I took the liberty of opening it because His Highness was obviously enjoying the entertainment. I didn't want to interrupt unless really necessary.

PILKINGS Yes, yes of course, sir.

RESIDENT Is it really as bad as it says? What's it all about?

PILKINGS Some strange custom they have sir. It seems because the King is dead some important chief has to commit suicide.

RESIDENT The King? Isn't it the same one who died nearly a month ago?

PILKINGS Yes sir.

RESIDENT Haven't they buried him yet?

PILKINGS They take their time about these things, sir. The preburial ceremonies last nearly thirty days. It seems tonight is the final night.

RESIDENT But what has it got to do with the market women? Why are they rioting? We've waived that troublesome tax¹ haven't we?

PILKINGS We don't quite know that they are exactly rioting yet sir. Sergeant Amusa is sometimes prone to exaggerations.

RESIDENT He sounds desperate enough. That comes out even in his rather quaint grammar. Where is the man anyway? I asked my aide-de-camp to bring him here.

PILKINGS They are probably looking in the wrong verandah. I'll fetch him myself.

RESIDENT No no you stay here. Let your wife go and look for them.
Do you mind my dear . . . ?

JANE Certainly not, your Excellency. [*Goes.*]

RESIDENT You should have kept me informed, Pilkings. You realise how disastrous it would have been if things had erupted while His Highness was here.

PILKINGS I wasn't aware of the whole business until tonight sir.

RESIDENT Nose to the ground Pilkings, nose to the ground. If we all let these little things slip past us where would the empire be eh? Tell me that. Where would we all be?

PILKINGS [*low voice*] Sleeping peacefully at home I bet.

RESIDENT What did you say Pilkings?

PILKINGS It won't happen again sir.

RESIDENT It mustn't Pilkings. It mustn't. Where is that damned sergeant? I ought to get back to His Highness as quickly as possible and offer him some plausible explanation for my rather abrupt conduct. Can you think of one, Pilkings?

PILKINGS You could tell him the truth, sir.

RESIDENT I could? No no no Pilkings, that would never do. What! Go and tell him there is a riot just two miles away from him? This is supposed to be a secure colony of His Majesty, Pilkings.

PILKINGS Yes, sir.

RESIDENT Ah, there they are. No, these are not our native police. Are these the ring-leaders of the riot?

PILKINGS Sir, these are my police officers.

RESIDENT Oh, I beg your pardon officers. You do look a little . . . I say, isn't there something missing in their uniform? I think they used to have some rather colourful sashes. If I remember rightly I recommended them myself in my young days in the service. A bit of colour always appeals to the natives, yes, I remember putting that in my report. Well well well, where are we? Make your report man.

PILKINGS [*moves close to AMUSA, between his teeth*] And let's have no more superstitious nonsense from you Amusa or I'll throw you in the guardroom for a month and feed you pork!

RESIDENT What's that? What has pork to do with it?

PILKINGS Sir, I was just warning him to be brief. I'm sure you are most anxious to hear his report.

RESIDENT Yes yes yes of course. Come on man, speak up. Hey, didn't we give them some colourful fez hats with all those wavy things, yes, pink tassels . . .

PILKINGS Sir, I think if he was permitted to make his report we might find that he lost his hat in the riot.

RESIDENT Ah yes indeed. I'd better tell His Highness that. Lost his hat in the riot, ha ha. He'll probably say well, as long as he didn't lose his head. [*Chuckles to himself.*] Don't forget to send me a report first thing in the morning young Pilkings.

PILKINGS No sir.

RESIDENT And whatever you do, don't let things get out of hand. Keep a cool head and—nose to the ground Pilkings. [*Wanders off in the general direction of the hall.*]

PILKINGS Yes, sir.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Would you be needing me sir?

PILKINGS No thanks Bob. I think His Excellency's need of you is greater than ours.

AIDE-DE-CAMP We have a detachment of soldiers from the capital sir. They accompanied His Highness up here.

PILKINGS I doubt if it will come to that but, thanks, I'll bear it in mind. Oh, could you send an orderly with my cloak.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Very good sir. [*Goes.*]

PILKINGS Now sergeant.

AMUSA Sir . . . [*Makes an effort, stops dead. Eyes to the ceiling.*]

PILKINGS Oh, not again.

AMUSA I cannot against death to dead cult. This dress get power of dead.

PILKINGS Alright, let's go. You are relieved of all further duty Amusa. Report to me first thing in the morning.

JANE Shall I come Simon?

PILKINGS No, there's no need for that. If I can get back later I will. Otherwise get Bob to bring you home.

JANE Be careful Simon . . . I mean, be clever.

PILKINGS Sure I will. You two, come with me. [*As he turns to go, the clock in the Residency begins to chime. PILKINGS looks at his watch then turns, horror-stricken, to stare at his wife. The same thought clearly occurs to her. He swallows hard. An orderly brings his cloak.*] It's midnight. I had no idea it was that late.

JANE But surely . . . they don't count the hours the way we do. The moon, or something . . .

PILKINGS I am . . . not so sure.

[He turns and breaks into a sudden run. The two CONSTABLES follow, also at a run. AMUSA, who has kept his eyes on the ceiling throughout waits until the last of the footsteps has faded out of hearing. He salutes suddenly, but without once looking in the direction of the woman.]

AMUSA Goodnight madam.

JANE Oh. [*She hesitates.*] Amusa . . . [*He goes off without seeming to have heard.*] Poor Simon . . . [*A figure emerges from the shadows, a young black man dressed in a sober western suit. He peeps into the hall, trying to make out the figures of the dancers.*] Who is that?

OLUNDE [*emerging into the light*] I didn't mean to startle you madam. I am looking for the District Officer.

JANE Wait a minute . . . don't I know you? Yes, you are Olunde, the young man who . . .

OLUNDE Mrs Pilkings! How fortunate. I came here to look for your husband.

JANE Olunde! Let's look at you. What a fine young man you've become. Grand but solemn. Good God, when did you return? Simon never said a word. But you do look well Olunde. Really!

OLUNDE You are . . . well, you look quite well yourself Mrs Pilkings. From what little I can see of you.

JANE Oh, this. It's caused quite a stir I assure you, and not all of it very pleasant. You are not shocked I hope?

OLUNDE Why should I be? But don't you find it rather hot in there? Your skin must find it difficult to breathe.

JANE Well, it is a little hot I must confess, but it's all in a good cause.

OLUNDE What cause Mrs Pilkings?

JANE All this. The ball. And His Highness being here in person and all that.

OLUNDE [*mildly*] And that is the good cause for which you desecrate an ancestral mask?

JANE Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing.

OLUNDE No I am not shocked Mrs Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.

JANE Oh. So you've returned with a chip on your shoulder. That's a pity Olunde. I am sorry.

[An uncomfortable silence follows.]

I take it then that you did not find your stay in England altogether edifying.

OLUNDE I don't say that. I found your people quite admirable in many ways, their conduct and courage in this war² for instance.

JANE Ah yes, the war. Here of course it is all rather remote. From time to time we have a black-out drill just to remind us that there is a war on. And the rare convoy passes through on its way somewhere or on manoeuvres. Mind you there is the occasional bit of excitement like that ship that was blown up in the harbour.

OLUNDE Here? Do you mean through enemy action?

JANE Oh no, the war hasn't come that close. The captain did it himself. I don't quite understand it really. Simon tried to explain. The ship had to be blown up because it had become dangerous to the other ships, even to the city itself. Hundreds of the coastal population would have died.

OLUNDE Maybe it was loaded with ammunition and had caught fire. Or some of those lethal gases they've been experimenting on.

JANE Something like that. The captain blew himself up with it. Deliberately. Simon said someone had to remain on board to light the fuse.

OLUNDE It must have been a very short fuse.

JANE [*shrugs*] I don't know much about it. Only that there was no other way to save lives. No time to devise anything else. The captain took the decision and carried it out.

OLUNDE Yes . . . I quite believe it. I met men like that in England.

JANE Oh just look at me! Fancy welcoming you back with such morbid news. Stale³ too. It was at least six months ago.

OLUNDE I don't find it morbid at all. I find it rather inspiring. It is an affirmative commentary on life.

JANE What is?

OLUNDE That captain's self-sacrifice.

JANE Nonsense. Life should never be thrown deliberately away.

OLUNDE And the innocent people round the harbour?

JANE Oh, how does one know? The whole thing was probably exaggerated anyway.

OLUNDE That was a risk the captain couldn't take. But please Mrs Pilkings, do you think you could find your husband for me? I have to talk to him.

JANE Simon? Oh. [*As she recollects for the first time the full significance of OLUNDE's presence.*] Simon is . . . there is a little problem in town. He was sent for. But . . . when did you arrive? Does Simon know you're here?

OLUNDE [*suddenly earnest*] I need your help Mrs Pilkings. I've always found you somewhat more understanding than your husband. Please find him for me and when you do, you must help me talk to him.

JANE I'm afraid I don't quite . . . follow you. Have you seen my husband already?

OLUNDE I went to your house. Your houseboy told me you were here. [*He smiles.*] He even told me how I would recognise you and Mr Pilkings.

JANE Then you must know what my husband is trying to do for you.

OLUNDE For me?

JANE For you. For your people. And to think he didn't even know you were coming back! But how do you happen to be here? Only

this evening we were talking about you. We thought you were still four thousand miles away.

OLUNDE I was sent a cable.

JANE A cable? Who did? Simon? The business of your father didn't begin till tonight.

OLUNDE A relation sent it weeks ago, and it said nothing about my father. All it said was, Our King is dead. But I knew I had to return home at once so as to bury my father. I understood that.

JANE Well, thank God you don't have to go through that agony. Simon is going to stop it.

OLUNDE That's why I want to see him. He's wasting his time. And since he has been so helpful to me I don't want him to incur the enmity of our people. Especially over nothing.

JANE [*sits down open-mouthed*] You . . . you Olunde!

OLUNDE Mrs Pilkings, I came home to bury my father. As soon as I heard the news I booked my passage home. In fact we were fortunate. We travelled in the same convoy as your Prince, so we had excellent protection.

JANE But you don't think your father is also entitled to whatever protection is available to him?

OLUNDE How can I make you understand? He *has* protection. No one can undertake what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people? What would you think of your Prince if he refused to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage? This . . . showing-the-flag tour of colonial possessions.

JANE I see. So it isn't just medicine you studied in England.

OLUNDE Yet another error into which your people fall. You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you.

JANE Not so fast Olunde. You have learnt to argue I can tell that, but I never said you made sense. However clearly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse—it's feudal!⁴ The king dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get!

OLUNDE [*waves his hand towards the background. The PRINCE is dancing past again—to a different step—and all the guests are bowing and curtseying as he passes*] And this? Even in the midst of a devastating war, look at that. What name would you give to that?

JANE Therapy, British style. The preservation of sanity in the midst of chaos.

OLUNDE Others would call it decadence. However, it doesn't really interest me. You white races know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilisation for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realised that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way.

JANE Through ritual suicide?

OLUNDE Is that worse than mass suicide? Mrs Pilkings, what do you call what those young men are sent to do by their generals in this war? Of course you have also mastered the art of calling things by names which don't remotely describe them.

JANE You talk! You people with your long-winded, roundabout way of making conversation.

OLUNDE Mrs Pilkings, whatever we do, we never suggest that a thing is the opposite of what it really is. In your newsreels⁵ I heard defeats, thorough, murderous defeats described as strategic victories. No wait, it wasn't just on your newsreels. Don't forget I was attached to hospitals all the time. Hordes of your wounded passed through those wards. I spoke to them. I spent long evenings by their bedsides while they spoke terrible truths of the realities of that war. I know now how history is made.

JANE But surely, in a war of this nature, for the morale of the nation you must expect . . .

OLUNDE That a disaster beyond human reckoning be spoken of as a triumph? No. I mean, is there no mourning in the home of the

bereaved that such blasphemy is permitted?

JANE [*after a moment's pause*] Perhaps I can understand you now. The time we picked for you was not really one for seeing us at our best.

OLUNDE Don't think it was just the war. Before that even started I had plenty of time to study your people. I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgement on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all.

JANE [*hesitantly*] Was it the . . . colour thing? I know there is some discrimination.

OLUNDE Don't make it so simple, Mrs Pilkings. You make it sound as if when I left, I took nothing at all with me.

JANE Yes . . . and to tell the truth, only this evening, Simon and I agreed that we never really knew what you left with.

OLUNDE Neither did I. But I found out over there. I am grateful to your country for that. And I will never give it up.

JANE Olunde please . . . promise me something. Whatever you do, don't throw away what you have started to do. You want to be a doctor. My husband and I believe you will make an excellent one, sympathetic and competent. Don't let anything make you throw away your training.

OLUNDE [*genuinely surprised*] Of course not. What a strange idea. I intend to return and complete my training. Once the burial of my father is over.

JANE Oh, please . . . !

OLUNDE Listen! Come outside. You can't hear anything against that music.

JANE What is it?

OLUNDE The drums. Can you hear the changes? Listen.

[The drums come over, still distant but more distinct. There is a change of rhythm, it rises to a crescendo and then, suddenly, it is cut off. After a silence, a new beat begins, slow and resonant.]

There, it's all over.

JANE You mean he's . . .

OLUNDE Yes, Mrs Pilkings, my father is dead. His will-power has always been enormous; I know he is dead.

JANE [*screams*] How can you be so callous! So unfeeling! You announce your father's own death like a surgeon looking down on some strange . . . stranger's body! You're just a savage like all the rest.

AIDE-DE-CAMP [*rushing out*] Mrs Pilkings. Mrs Pilkings. [*She breaks down, sobbing.*] Are you all right, Mrs Pilkings?

OLUNDE She'll be all right. [*Turns to go.*]

AIDE-DE-CAMP Who are you? And who the hell asked your opinion?

OLUNDE You're quite right, nobody. [*Going.*]

AIDE-DE-CAMP What the hell! Did you hear me ask you who you were?

OLUNDE I have business to attend to.

AIDE-DE-CAMP I'll give you business in a moment you impudent nigger. Answer my question!

OLUNDE I have a funeral to arrange. Excuse me. [*Going.*]

AIDE-DE-CAMP I said stop! Orderly!

JANE No, no, don't do that. I'm alright. And for heaven's sake don't act so foolishly. He's a family friend.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Well he'd better learn to answer civil questions when he's asked them. These natives put a suit on and they get high opinions of themselves.

OLUNDE Can I go now?

JANE No no don't go. I must talk to you. I'm sorry about what I said.

OLUNDE It's nothing, Mrs Pilkings. And I'm really anxious to go. I couldn't see my father before, it's forbidden for me, his heir and successor, to set eyes on him from the moment of the king's death. But now . . . I would like to touch his body while it is still warm.

JANE You will. I promise I shan't keep you long. Only, I couldn't possibly let you go like that. Bob, please excuse us.

AIDE-DE-CAMP If you're sure . . .

JANE Of course I'm sure. Something happened to upset me just then, but I'm alright now. Really.

[*The AIDE-DE-CAMP goes, somewhat reluctantly.*]

OLUNDE I mustn't stay long.

JANE Please, I promise not to keep you. It's just that . . . oh you saw yourself what happens to one in this place. The Resident's man thought he was being helpful, that's the way we all react. But I can't go in among that crowd just now and if I stay by myself somebody will come looking for me. Please, just say something for a few moments and then you can go. Just so I can recover myself.

OLUNDE What do you want me to say?

JANE Your calm acceptance for instance, can you explain that? It was so unnatural. I don't understand that at all. I feel a need to understand all I can.

OLUNDE But you explained it yourself. My medical training perhaps. I have seen death too often. And the soldiers who returned from the front, they died on our hands all the time.

JANE No. It has to be more than that. I feel it has to do with the many things we don't really grasp about your people. At least you can explain.

OLUNDE All these things are part of it. And anyway, my father has been dead in my mind for nearly a month. Ever since I learnt of the King's death. I've lived with my bereavement so long now that I cannot think of him alive. On that journey on the boat, I kept my mind on my duties as the one who must perform the rites over his body. I went through it all again and again in my mind as he himself had taught me. I didn't want to do anything wrong, something which might jeopardise the welfare of my people.

JANE But he had disowned you. When you left he swore publicly you were no longer his son.

OLUNDE I told you, he was a man of tremendous will. Sometimes that's another way of saying stubborn. But among our people, you don't disown a child just like that. Even if I had died before him I would still be buried like his eldest son. But it's time for me to go.

JANE Thank you. I feel calmer. Don't let me keep you from your duties.

OLUNDE Goodnight, Mrs Pilkings.

JANE Welcome home. [*She holds out her hand. As he takes it footsteps are heard approaching the drive. A short while later a woman's sobbing is also heard.*]

PILKINGS [*off*] Keep them here till I get back. [*He strides into view, reacts at the sight of OLUNDE but turns to his wife.*] Thank goodness you're still here.

JANE Simon, what happened?

PILKINGS Later Jane, please. Is Bob still here?

JANE Yes, I think so. I'm sure he must be.

PILKINGS Try and get him out here as quickly as you can. Tell him it's urgent.

JANE Of course. Oh Simon, you remember . . .

PILKINGS Yes yes. I can see who it is. Get Bob out here. [*She runs off.*] At first I thought I was seeing a ghost.

OLUNDE Mr Pilkings, I appreciate what you tried to do. I want you to believe that. I can tell you it would have been a terrible calamity if you'd succeeded.

PILKINGS [*opens his mouth several times, shuts it*] You . . . said what?

OLUNDE A calamity for us, the entire people.

PILKINGS [*sighs*] I see. Hm.

OLUNDE And now I must go. I must see him before he turns cold.

PILKINGS Oh ah . . . em . . . but this is a shock to see you. I mean er thinking all this while you were in England and thanking God for that.

OLUNDE I came on the mail boat. We travelled in the Prince's convoy.

PILKINGS Ah yes, a-ah, hm . . . er well . . .

OLUNDE Goodnight. I can see you are shocked by the whole business. But you must know by now there are things you cannot understand—or help.

PILKINGS Yes. Just a minute. There are armed policemen that way and they have instructions to let no one pass. I suggest you wait a little. I'll er . . . give you an escort.

OLUNDE That's very kind of you. But do you think it could be quickly arranged?

PILKINGS Of course. In fact, yes, what I'll do is send Bob over with some men to the er . . . place. You can go with them. Here he comes now. Excuse me a minute.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Anything wrong sir?

PILKINGS [*takes him to one side*] Listen Bob, that cellar in the disused annexe of the Residency, you know, where the slaves were stored before being taken down to the coast . . . 6

AIDE-DE-CAMP Oh yes, we use it as a storeroom for broken furniture.

PILKINGS But it's still got the bars on it?

AIDE-DE-CAMP Oh yes, they are quite intact.

PILKINGS Get the keys please. I'll explain later. And I want a strong guard over the Residency tonight.

AIDE-DE-CAMP We have that already. The detachment from the coast . . .

PILKINGS No, I don't want them at the gates of the Residency. I want you to deploy them at the bottom of the hill, a long way from the main hall so they can deal with any situation long before the sound carries to the house.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Yes of course.

PILKINGS I don't want His Highness alarmed.

AIDE-DE-CAMP You think the riot will spread here?

PILKINGS It's unlikely but I don't want to take a chance. I made them believe I was going to lock the man up in my house, which was what I had planned to do in the first place. They are probably assailing it by now. I took a roundabout route here so I don't think there is any danger at all. At least not before dawn. Nobody is to leave the premises of course—the native employees I mean. They'll soon smell something is up and they can't keep their mouths shut.

AIDE-DE-CAMP I'll give instructions at once.

PILKINGS I'll take the prisoner down myself. Two policemen will stay with him throughout the night. Inside the cell.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Right sir. [*Salutes and goes off at the double.*]

PILKINGS Jane. Bob is coming back in a moment with a detachment. Until he gets back please stay with Olunde. [*He makes an extra*

warning gesture with his eyes.]

OLUNDE Please, Mr Pilkings . . .

PILKINGS I hate to be stuffy old son, but we have a crisis on our hands. It has to do with your father's affair if you must know. And it happens also at a time when we have His Highness here. I am responsible for security so you'll simply have to do as I say. I hope that's understood. [*Marches off quickly, in the direction from which he made his first appearance.*]

OLUNDE What's going on? All this can't be just because he failed to stop my father killing himself.

JANE I honestly don't know. Could it have sparked off a riot?

OLUNDE No. If he'd succeeded that would be more likely to start the riot. Perhaps there were other factors involved. Was there a chieftancy dispute?

JANE None that I know of.

ELESIN [*an animal bellow⁷ from off*] Leave me alone! Is it not enough that you have covered me in shame! White man, take your hand from my body!

[*OLUNDE stands frozen to the spot. JANE, understanding at last, tries to move him.*]

JANE Let's go in. It's getting chilly out here.

PILKINGS [*off*] Carry him.

ELESIN Give me back the name you have taken away from me you ghost from the land of the nameless!

PILKINGS Carry him! I can't have a disturbance here. Quickly! stuff up his mouth.

JANE Oh God! Let's go in. Please Olunde. [*OLUNDE does not move.*]

ELESIN Take your albino's⁸ hand from me you . . .

[*Sounds of a struggle. His voice chokes as he is gagged.*]

OLUNDE [*quietly*] That was my father's voice.

JANE Oh you poor orphan, what have you come home to?

[*There is a sudden explosion of rage from off-stage and powerful steps come running up the drive.*]

PILKINGS You bloody fools, after him!

[Immediately ELESIN, in handcuffs, comes pounding in the direction of JANE and OLUNDE, followed some moments afterwards by PILKINGS and the CONSTABLES. ELESIN, confronted by the seeming statue of his son, stops dead. ELESIN, confronted by the seeming statue of his son, stops dead. OLUNDE stares above his head into the distance. The CONSTABLES try to grab him. JANE screams at them.]

JANE Leave him alone! Simon, tell them to leave him alone.

PILKINGS All right, stand aside you. *[Shrugs.]* Maybe just as well. It might help to calm him down.

[For several moments they hold the same position. ELESIN moves a step forward, almost as if he's still in doubt.]

ELESIN Olunde? *[He moves his head, inspecting him from side to side.]* Olunde! *[He collapses slowly at OLUNDE's feet.]* Oh son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind!

OLUNDE *[he moves for the first time since he heard his voice, brings his head slowly down to look on him]* I have no father, eater of left-overs.

[He walks slowly down the way his father had run. Light fades out on ELESIN, sobbing into the ground.]

Endnotes

- Note 3: An elaborate masked ball long associated with the English court.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A patriotic British anthem composed in 1740.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Harsh and throaty sound.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The person who controls the movements of the dancing mask when its movements seem excessive.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Uniformed.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: A tray of silver or glass.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A military assistant to a civilian administrator.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Taxes levied on market women often sparked riots in colonial West Africa, such as the “Women’s War” that erupted in Nigeria in 1929.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: World War II. Some 45,000 Nigerian soldiers served in the British Army, helping to fuel the country’s postwar independence movement.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Old or out of date.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: System of government in which vassals lived on the land of nobility and paid homage in return for protection; also a term connoting an outmoded way of life.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Tapes of news and features shown in movie houses before the main features. This was common before the age of television and prominent during World War II.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The area historically known as Africa’s Slave Coast extended from Nigeria to present-day Ghana.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A loud, hollow sound usually associated with animals, especially cows; in some cases, it was considered to be a feature of the language of *egungun* and other masked figures.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: *Albino* is a term of abuse when used in reference to a White person.[Return to reference 8](#)

5

A wide iron-barred gate stretches almost the whole width of the cell in which ELESIN is imprisoned. His wrists are encased in thick iron bracelets, chained together; he stands against the bars, looking out. Seated on the ground to one side on the outside is his recent bride, her eyes bent perpetually to the ground. Figures of the two GUARDS can be seen deeper inside the cell, alert to every movement ELESIN makes, PILKINGS now in a police officer's uniform, enters noiselessly, observes him a while. Then he coughs ostentatiously and approaches. Leans against the bars near a corner, his back to ELESIN. He is obviously trying to fall in mood with him. Some moments' silence.

PILKINGS You seem fascinated by the moon.

ELESIN [*after a pause*] Yes, ghostly one. Your twin-brother up there engages my thoughts.

PILKINGS It is a beautiful night.

ELESIN Is that so?

PILKINGS The light on the leaves, the peace of the night . . .

ELESIN The night is not at peace, District Officer.

PILKINGS No? I would have said it was. You know, quiet . . .

ELESIN And does quiet mean peace for you?

PILKINGS Well, nearly the same thing. Naturally there is a subtle difference . . .

ELESIN The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world for ever. There is no sleep in the world tonight.

PILKINGS It is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night's sleep as the price of saving a man's life.

ELESIN You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it.

PILKINGS Now come on . . .

ELESIN And not merely my life but the lives of many. The end of the night's work is not over. Neither this year nor the next will see it. If

I wished you well, I would pray that you do not stay long enough on our land to see the disaster you have brought upon us.

PILKINGS Well, I did my duty as I saw it. I have no regrets.

ELESIN No. The regrets of life always come later.

[Some moments' pause.]

You are waiting for dawn white man. I hear you saying to yourself: only so many hours until dawn and then the danger is over. All I must do is to keep him alive tonight. You don't quite understand it all but you know that tonight is when what ought to be must be brought about. I shall ease your mind even more, ghostly one. It is not an entire night but a moment of the night, and that moment is past. The moon was my messenger and guide. When it reached a certain gateway in the sky, it touched that moment for which my whole life has been spent in blessings. Even I do not know the gateway. I have stood here and scanned the sky for a glimpse of that door but, I cannot see it. Human eyes are useless for a search of this nature. But in the house of *osugbo*, those who keep watch through the spirit recognised the moment, they sent word to me through the voice of our sacred drums to prepare myself. I heard them and I shed all thoughts of earth. I began to follow the moon to the abode of the gods . . . servant of the white king, that was when you entered my chosen place of departure on feet of desecration.

PILKINGS I'm sorry, but we all see our duty differently.

ELESIN I no longer blame you. You stole from me my first-born, sent him to your country so you could turn him into something in your own image. Did you plan it all beforehand? There are moments when it seems part of a larger plan. He who must follow my footsteps is taken from me, sent across the ocean. Then, in my turn, I am stopped from fulfilling my destiny. Did you think it all out before, this plan to push our world from its course and sever the cord that links us to the great origin?

PILKINGS You don't really believe that. Anyway, if that was my intention with your son, I appear to have failed.

ELESIN You did not fail in the main thing ghostly one. We know the roof covers the rafters,⁹ the cloth covers blemishes; who would have known that the white skin covered our future, preventing us from seeing the death our enemies had prepared for us. The world is set adrift and its inhabitants are lost. Around them, there is nothing but emptiness.

PILKINGS Your son does not take so gloomy a view.

ELESIN Are you dreaming now, white man? Were you not present at the reunion of shame? Did you not see when the world reversed itself and the father fell before his son, asking forgiveness?

PILKINGS That was in the heat of the moment. I spoke to him and . . . if you want to know, he wishes he could cut out his tongue for uttering the words he did.

ELESIN No. What he said must never be unsaid. The contempt of my own son rescued something of my shame at your hands. You have stopped me in my duty but I know now that I did give birth to a son. Once I mistrusted him for seeking the companionship of those my spirit knew as enemies of our race. Now I understand. One should seek to obtain the secrets of his enemies. He will avenge my shame, white one. His spirit will destroy you and yours.

PILKINGS That kind of talk is hardly called for. If you don't want my consolation . . .

ELESIN No white man, I do not want your consolation.

PILKINGS As you wish. Your son, anyway, sends his consolation. He asks your forgiveness. When I asked him not to despise you his reply was: I cannot judge him, and if I cannot judge him, I cannot despise him. He wants to come to you and say goodbye and to receive your blessing.

ELESIN Goodbye? Is he returning to your land?

PILKINGS Don't you think that's the most sensible thing for him to do? I advised him to leave at once, before dawn, and he agrees that is the right course of action.

ELESIN Yes, it is best. And even if I did not think so, I have lost the father's place of honour. My voice is broken.

PILKINGS Your son honours you. If he didn't he would not ask your blessing.

ELESIN No. Even a thoroughbred is not without pity for the turf he strikes with his hoof. When is he coming?

PILKINGS As soon as the town is a little quieter. I advised it.

ELESIN Yes white man, I am sure you advised it. You advise all our lives although on the authority of what gods, I do not know.

PILKINGS [*opens his mouth to reply, then appears to change his mind. Turns to go. Hesitates and stops again*] Before I leave you, may I ask just one thing of you?

ELESIN I am listening.

PILKINGS I wish to ask you to search the quiet of your heart and tell me—do you not find great contradictions in the wisdom of your own race?

ELESIN Make yourself clear, white one.

PILKINGS I have lived among you long enough to learn a saying or two. One came to my mind tonight when I stepped into the market and saw what was going on. You were surrounded by those who egged you on with song and praises. I thought, are these not the same people who say: the elder grimly approaches heaven and you ask him to bear your greetings yonder; do you really think he makes the journey willingly? After that, I did not hesitate.

[*A pause. ELESIN sighs. Before he can speak a sound of running feet is heard.*]

JANE [*off*] Simon! Simon!

PILKINGS What on earth . . . ! [*Runs off.*]

[*ELESIN turns to his new wife, gazes on her for some moments.*]

ELESIN My young bride, did you hear the ghostly one? You sit and sob in your silent heart but say nothing to all this. First I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of the sapping of my will. But blame is a strange peace offering for a man to bring a world

he has deeply wronged, and to its innocent dwellers. Oh little mother, I have taken countless women in my life but you were more than a desire of the flesh. I needed you as the abyss across which my body must be drawn, I filled it with earth and dropped my seed in it at the moment of preparedness for my crossing. You were the final gift of the living to their emissary to the land of the ancestors, and perhaps your warmth and youth brought new insights of this world to me and turned my feet leaden on this side of the abyss. For I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled.

[Approaching voices of PILKINGS and his wife.]

JANE Oh Simon, you will let her in won't you?

PILKINGS I really wish you'd stop interfering.

[They come into view. JANE is in a dressing-gown. PILKINGS is holding a note to which he refers from time to time.]

JANE Good gracious, I didn't initiate this. I was sleeping quietly, or trying to anyway, when the servant brought it. It's not my fault if one can't sleep undisturbed even in the Residency.

PILKINGS He'd have done the same thing if we were sleeping at home so don't sidetrack the issue. He knows he can get round you or he wouldn't send you the petition in the first place.

JANE Be fair Simon. After all he was thinking of your own interests. He is grateful you know, you seem to forget that. He feels he owes you something.

PILKINGS I just wish they'd leave this man alone tonight, that's all.

JANE Trust him Simon. He's pledged his word it will all go peacefully.

PILKINGS Yes, and that's the other thing. I don't like being threatened.

JANE Threatened? *[Takes the note.]* I didn't spot any threat.

PILKINGS It's there. Veiled, but it's there. The only way to prevent serious rioting tomorrow—what a cheek!

JANE I don't think he's threatening you Simon.

PILKINGS He's picked up the idiom alright. Wouldn't surprise me if he's been mixing with commies¹ or anarchists over there. The phrasing sounds too good to be true. Damn! If only the Prince hadn't picked this time for his visit.

JANE Well, even so Simon, what have you got to lose? You don't want a riot on your hands, not with the Prince here.

PILKINGS [*going up to* ELESIN] Let's see what he has to say. Chief Elesin, there is yet another person who wants to see you. As she is not a next-of-kin I don't really feel obliged to let her in. But your son sent a note with her, so it's up to you.

ELESIN I know who that must be. So she found out your hiding-place. Well, it was not difficult. My stench of shame is so strong, it requires no hunter's dog to follow it.

PILKINGS If you don't want to see her, just say so and I'll send her packing.

ELESIN Why should I not want to see her? Let her come. I have no more holes in my rag of shame. All is laid bare.

PILKINGS I'll bring her in. [*Goes off.*]

JANE [*hesitates, then goes to* ELESIN] Please, try and understand. Everything my husband did was for the best.

ELESIN [*he gives her a long strange stare, as if he is trying to understand who she is*] You are the wife of the District Officer?

JANE Yes. My name, is Jane.

ELESIN That is my wife sitting down there. You notice how still and silent she sits? My business is with your husband.

[PILKINGS *returns with* IYALOJA.]

PILKINGS Here she is. Now first I want your word of honour that you will try nothing foolish.

ELESIN Honour? White one, did you say you wanted my word of honour?

PILKINGS I know you to be an honourable man. Give me your word of honour you will receive nothing from her.

ELESIN But I am sure you have searched her clothing as you would never dare touch your own mother. And there are these two lizards of yours who roll their eyes even when I scratch.

PILKINGS And I shall be sitting on that tree trunk watching even how you blink. Just the same I want your word that you will not let her pass anything to you.

ELESIN You have my honour already. It is locked up in that desk in which you will put away your report of this night's events. Even the honour of my people you have taken already; it is tied together with those papers of treachery which make you masters in this land.

PILKINGS Alright. I am trying to make things easy but if you must bring in politics we'll have to do it the hard way. Madam, I want you to remain along this line and move no nearer to the cell door. Guards! [*They spring to attention.*] If she moves beyond this point, blow your whistle. Come on Jane. [*They go off.*]

IYALOJA How boldly the lizard struts before the pigeon when it was the eagle itself he promised us he would confront.

ELESIN I don't ask you to take pity on me Iyaloja. You have a message for me or you would not have come. Even if it is the curses of the world, I shall listen.

IYALOJA You made so bold with the servant of the white king who took your side against death. I must tell your brother chiefs when I return how bravely you waged war against him. Especially with words.

ELESIN I more than deserve your scorn.

IYALOJA [*with sudden anger*] I warned you, if you must leave a seed behind, be sure it is not tainted with the curses of the world. Who are you to open a new life when you dared not open the door to a new existence? I say who are you to make so bold? [*The BRIDE sobs and IYALOJA notices her. Her contempt noticeably increases as she turns back to ELESIN.*] Oh you self-vaunted² stem of the plantain, how hollow it all proves. The pith is gone in the parent stem, so how will it prove with the new shoot?³ How will it go with

that earth that bears it? Who are you to bring this abomination on us!

ELESIN My powers deserted me. My charms, my spells, even my voice lacked strength when I made to summon the powers that would lead me over the last measure of earth into the land of the fleshless. You saw it, Iyaloja. You saw me struggle to retrieve my will from the power of the stranger whose shadow fell across the doorway and left me floundering and blundering in a maze I had never before encountered. My senses were numbed when the touch of cold iron⁴ came upon my wrists. I could do nothing to save myself.

IYALOJA You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats⁵ such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left-overs. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter. We said you were the hunter returning home in triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck; you said wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes. We said yours was the doorway at which we first spy the tapper when he comes down from the tree, yours was the blessing of the twilight wine,⁶ the purl that brings night spirits out of doors to steal their portion before the light of day. We said yours was the body of wine whose burden shakes the tapper like a sudden gust on his perch. You said, No, I am content to lick the dregs⁷ from each calabash when the drinkers are done. We said, the dew on earth's surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honour. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice; I shall fight them for the left-overs of the world.

ELESIN Enough Iyaloja, enough.

IYALOJA We called you leader and oh, how you led us on. What we have no intention of eating should not be held to the nose.

ELESIN Enough, enough. My shame is heavy enough.

IYALOJA Wait. I came with a burden.

ELESIN You have more than discharged it.

IYALOJA I wish I could pity you.

ELESIN I need neither your pity nor the pity of the world. I need understanding. Even I need to understand. You were present at my defeat. You were part of the beginnings. You brought about the renewal of my tie to earth, you helped in the binding of the cord.

IYALOJA I gave you warning. The river which fills up before our eyes does not sweep us away in its flood.

ELESIN What were warnings beside the moist contact of living earth between my fingers? What were warnings beside the renewal of famished embers lodged eternally in the heart of man. But even that, even if it overwhelmed one with a thousandfold temptations to linger a little while, a man could overcome it. It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will,⁸ when a stranger force of violence shatters the mind's calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in this alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnamable strangers. I made to utter my spells anew but my tongue merely rattled in my mouth. I fingered hidden charms and the contact was d there was no spark left to sever the life-strings that should stretch from every finger-tip. My will was squelched in the spittle⁹ of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought—that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger's intervention.

IYALOJA Explain it how you will, I hope it brings you peace of mind. The bush-rat fled his rightful cause, reached the market and set up a lamentation. 'Please save me!'—are these fitting words to hear from an ancestral mask? 'There's a wild beast at my heels' is not becoming language from a hunter.

ELESIN May the world forgive me.

IYALOJA I came with a burden I said. It approaches the gates which are so well guarded by those jackals whose spittle will from this

day be on your food and drink. But first, tell me, you who were once Elesin Oba, tell me, you who know so well the cycle of the plantain: is it the parent shoot which withers to give sap¹ to the younger or, does your wisdom see it running the other way?

ELESIN I don't see your meaning Iyaloja?

IYALOJA Did I ask you for a meaning? I asked a question. Whose trunk withers to give sap to the other? The parent shoot or the younger?

ELESIN The parent.

IYALOJA Ah. So you do know that. There are sights in this world which say different Elesin. There are some who choose to reverse the cycle of our being. Oh, you emptied bark² that the world once saluted for a pith-laden being, shall I tell you what the gods have claimed of you?

[In her agitation she steps beyond the line indicated by PILKINGS and the air is rent by piercing whistles. The two GUARDS also leap forward and place safe-guarding hands on ELESIN. IYALOJA stops, astonished. PILKINGS comes racing in, followed by JANE.]

PILKINGS What is it? Did they try something?

GUARD She stepped beyond the line.

ELESIN *[in a broken voice]* Let her alone. She meant no harm.

IYALOJA Oh Elesin, see what you've become. Once you had no need to open your mouth in explanation because evil-smelling goats, itchy of hand and foot, had lost their senses. And it was a brave man indeed who dared lay hands on you because Iyaloja stepped from one side of the earth onto another. Now look at the spectacle of your life. I grieve for you.

PILKINGS I think you'd better leave. I doubt you have done him much good by coming here. I shall make sure you are not allowed to see him again. In any case we are moving him to a different place before dawn, so don't bother to come back.

IYALOJA We foresaw that. Hence the burden I trudged here to lay beside your gates.

PILKINGS What was that you said?

IYALOJA Didn't our son explain? Ask that one. He knows what it is.

At least we hope the man we once knew as Elesin remembers the lesser Oaths he need not break.

PILKINGS Do you know what she is talking about?

ELESIN Go to the gates, ghostly one. Whatever you find there, bring it to me.

IYALOJA Not yet. It drags behind me on the slow, weary feet of women. Slow as it is Elesin, it has long overtaken you. It rides ahead of your laggard³ will.

PILKINGS What is she saying now? Christ! Must your people forever speak in riddles?

ELESIN It will come white man, it will come. Tell your men at the gates to let it through.

PILKINGS [*dubiously*] I'll have to see what it is.

IYALOJA You will. [*Passionately.*] But this is one oath he cannot shirk. White one, you have a king here, a visitor from your land. We know of his presence here. Tell me, were he to die would you leave his spirit roaming restlessly on the surface of earth? Would you bury him here among those you consider less than human? In your land have you no ceremonies of the dead?

PILKINGS Yes. But we don't make our chiefs commit suicide to keep him company.

IYALOJA Child, I have not come to help your understanding. [*Points to ELESIN.*] This is the man whose weakened understanding holds us in bondage to you. But ask him if you wish. He knows the meaning of a king's passage; he was not born yesterday. He knows the peril to the race when our dead father, who goes as intermediary, waits and waits and knows he is betrayed. He knows when the narrow gate was opened and he knows it will not stay for laggards who drag their feet in dung and vomit, whose lips are reeking of the left-overs of lesser men. He knows he has condemned our King to wander in the void of evil with beings who are enemies of life.

PILKINGS Yes er . . . but look here . . .

IYALOJA What we ask is little enough. Let him release our King so he can ride on homewards alone. The messenger is on his way on the backs of women. Let him send word through the heart that is folded up within the bolt. It is the least of all his oaths, it is the easiest fulfilled.

[*The AIDE-DE-CAMP runs in.*]

PILKINGS Bob?

AIDE-DE-CAMP Sir, there's a group of women chanting up the hill.

PILKINGS [*rounding on IYALOJA*] If you people want trouble . . .

JANE Simon, I think that's what Olunde referred to in his letter.

PILKINGS He knows damned well I can't have a crowd here! Damn it, I explained the delicacy of my position to him. I think it's about time I got him out of town. Bob, send a car and two or three soldiers to bring him in. I think the sooner he takes his leave of his father and gets out the better.

IYALOJA Save your labour white one. If it is the father of your prisoner you want, Olunde, he who until this night we knew as Elesin's son, he comes soon himself to take his leave. He has sent the women ahead, so let them in.

[*PILKINGS remains undecided.*]

AIDE-DE-CAMP What do we do about the invasion? We can still stop them far from here.

PILKINGS What do they look like?

AIDE-DE-CAMP They're not many. And they seem quite peaceful.

PILKINGS No men?

AIDE-DE-CAMP Mm, two or three at the most.

JANE Honestly, Simon, I'd trust Olunde. I don't think he'll deceive you about their intentions.

PILKINGS He'd better not. Alright then, let them in Bob. Warn them to control themselves. Then hurry Olunde here. Make sure he brings his baggage because I'm not returning him into town.

AIDE-DE-CAMP Very good, sir. [*Goes.*]

PILKINGS [*to IYALOJA*] I hope you understand that if anything goes wrong it will be on your head. My men have orders to shoot at the

first sign of trouble.

IYALOJA To prevent one death you will actually make other deaths?

Ah, great is the wisdom of the white race. But have no fear. Your Prince will sleep peacefully. So at long last will ours. We will disturb you no further, servant of the white King. Just let Elesin fulfil his oath and we will retire home and pay homage to our King.

JANE I believe her Simon, don't you?

PILKINGS Maybe.

ELESIN Have no fear ghostly one. I have a message to send my King and then you have nothing more to fear.

IYALOJA Olunde would have done it. The chiefs asked him to speak the words but he said no, not while you lived.

ELESIN Even from the depths to which my spirit has sunk, I find some joy that this little has been left to me.

[The WOMEN enter, intoning the dirge 'Alẹ lẹ lẹ' and swaying from side to side. On their shoulders is borne a longish object roughly like a cylindrical bolt, covered in cloth. They set it down on the spot where IYALOJA had stood earlier, and form a semi-circle round it. The PRAISE-SINGER and DRUMMER stand on the inside of the semi-circle but the drum is not used at all. The DRUMMER intones under the PRAISE-SINGER's invocations.]

PILKINGS *[as they enter]* What is *that*?

IYALOJA The burden you have made white one, but we bring it in peace.

PILKINGS I said *what* is it?

ELESIN White man, you must let me out. I have a duty to perform.

PILKINGS I most certainly will not.

ELESIN There lies the courier of my King. Let me out so I can perform what is demanded of me.

PILKINGS You'll do what you need to do from inside there or not at all. I've gone as far as I intend to with this business.

ELESIN The worshipper who lights a candle in your church to bear a message to his god bows his head and speaks in a whisper to the flame. Have I not seen it ghostly one? His voice does not ring out

to the world. Mine are no words for anyone's ears. They are not words even for the bearers of this load. They are words I must speak secretly, even as my father whispered them in my ears and I in the ears of my first-born. I cannot shout them to the wind and the open night-sky.

JANE Simon . . .

PILKINGS Don't interfere. Please!

IYALOJA They have slain the favourite horse of the King and slain his dog. They have borne them from pulse to pulse centre of the land receiving prayers for their King. But the rider has chosen to stay behind. Is it too much to ask that he speak his heart to heart of the waiting courier? [PILKINGS *turns his back on her.*] So be it, Elesin Oba, you see how even the mere leavings⁴ are denied you.

[*She gestures to the* PRAISE-SINGER.]

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Oba! I call you by that name only this last time. Remember when I said, if you cannot come, tell my horse.

[*Pause.*] What? I cannot hear you? I said, if you cannot come, whisper in the ears of my horse. Is your tongue severed from the roots Elesin? I can hear no response. I said, if there are boulders you cannot climb, mount my horse's back, this spotless black stallion, he'll bring you over them. [*Pauses.*] Elesin Oba, once you had a tongue that darted like a drummer's stick. I said, if you get lost my dog will track a path to me. My memory fails me but I think you replied: My feet have found the path, Alafin.

[*The dirge rises and falls.*]

I said at the last, if evil hands hold you back, just tell my horse there is weight on the hem of your smock. I dare not wait too long.

[*The dirge rises and falls.*]

There lies the swiftest ever messenger of a king, so set me free with the errand of your heart. There lie the head and heart of the favourite of the gods, whisper in his ears. Oh my companion, if you had followed when you should, we would not

say that the horse preceded its rider. If you had followed when it was time, we would not say the dog has raced beyond and left his master behind. If you had raised your will to cut the thread of life at the summons of the drums, we would not say your mere shadow fell across the gateway and took its owner's place at the banquet. But the hunter, laden with slain buffalo, stayed to root in the cricket's hole with his toes. What now is left? If there is a dearth of bats, the pigeon must serve us for the offering. Speak the words over your shadow which must now serve in your place.

ELESIN I cannot approach. Take off the cloth. I shall speak my message from heart to heart of silence.

IYALOJA [*moves forward and removes the covering*] Your courier Elesin, cast your eyes on the favoured companion of the King.

[*Rolled up in the mat, his head and feet showing at either end, is the body of OLUNDE.*]

There lies the honour of your household and of our race. Because he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life. The son has proved the father, Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums.

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness—you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future. Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin.

[ELESIN *has stood rock-still, his knuckles taut on the bars, his eyes glued to the body of his son. The stillness seizes and paralyses everyone, including PILKINGS who has turned to look.*

Suddenly ELESIN flings one arm round his neck, once, and with the loop of the chain, strangles himself in a swift, decisive pull. The GUARDS rush forward to stop him but they are only in time to let his body down. PILKINGS has leapt to the door at the same time and struggles with the lock. He rushes within, fumbles with the handcuffs and unlocks them, raises the body to a sitting position while he tries to give resuscitation. The WOMEN continue their dirge, unmoved by the sudden event.]

IYALOJA Why do you strain yourself? Why do you labour at tasks for which no one, not even the man lying there, would give you thanks? He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the King's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung.

PILKINGS [*in a tired voice*] Was this what you wanted?

IYALOJA No child, it is what you brought to be, you who play with strangers' lives, who even usurp the vestments of our dead, yet believe that the stain of death will not cling to you. The gods demanded only the old expired plantain but you cut down the sap-laden shoot to feed your pride. There is your board⁵ filled to overflowing. Feast on it. [*She screams at him suddenly, seeing that PILKINGS is about to close ELESIN's staring eyes.*] Let him alone! However sunk he was in debt he is no pauper's carrion⁶ abandoned on the road. Since when have strangers donned clothes of indigo before the bereaved cries out his loss?

[She turns to the BRIDE who has remained motionless throughout.]

Child.

[The girl takes up a little earth, walks calmly into the cell and closes ELESIN's eyes. She then pours some earth over each eyelid and comes out again.]

IYALOJA Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn.

[She goes off, accompanied by the BRIDE. The dirge rises in volume and the WOMEN continue their sway. Lights fade to a black-out.]

THE END

1975

Endnotes

- Note 9: Timbers supporting the roof of a house.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A disapproving term for communists. The Communist Party of Great Britain peaked in popularity in the late 1940s, particularly among Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Excessively self-praising, vain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The young plant that grows directly from the parent, not from a seed. "Pith": the inner part of a plant; its fiber or core.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A reference to a very sharp knife or razor.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pastries or candies made with sugar or honey.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Palm wine tapped before dawn is considered fresh and potent.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The sediment of leftover liquids; hence, considered impure.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In Yoruba cosmology, will is the life source that makes everything happen.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Saliva.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The vital liquid or juice circulating in a tree or plant, the equivalent of blood.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The external covering or skin of a tree.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Slow, sluggish, spent.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Remains or leftovers, usually of food.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Food.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The rotting flesh of a dead animal.[Return to reference 6](#)

CARYL CHURCHILL

b. 1938

Born in London, Churchill grew up an only child in a creative home in the Lake District, one that influenced her approach to theater. Her father was a political cartoonist, and she has said, "Cartoons are really so much like plays—an image with somebody saying something." Her mother worked variously as a secretary, model, and film actress, and Churchill's earliest exposure to theater was the Christmas pantomimes, which she would then act out at home. Her family moved to Montreal, Canada, when she was ten, but she returned to England for university. She studied English at Lady Margaret Hall, a women's college at Oxford, where she began to write plays, which were produced by student companies. Churchill has discussed the period after graduation in 1960 as grounded in family life and yet also solitary and politicizing. While raising her children, she struggled to carve out time for writing. She managed to develop short radio plays for the BBC, including *The Ants* (1962), *Lovesick* (1967), and *Abortive* (1971), but in the 1970s and 1980s her literary output grew prolific and increasingly experimental.

Churchill's first professional stage production, *Owners* (1972), premiered at the Royal Court Theatre where she would go on to serve as resident dramatist in 1974–75. Churchill's work, renowned for its exploration of gender and power, is unpredictable in its use of dialogue, casting, and props. *Cloud Nine*, perhaps her best-known play before *Top Girls*, debuted in England in 1979 and premiered off-

Broadway in New York in 1981. A comedic parody of the Victorian Empire, the first act is set in colonial Africa, the second in 1979 London. In her time-bending plot and cross-casting specifications, Churchill challenges her audience's concepts of race, class, and gender. The role of Joshua, a Black African servant, was played by a White man, and the roles of Victorian-era Betty, her son Edward, and Cathy, a little girl, were all cast opposite gender, with an adult man playing Cathy. A rag doll sufficed to represent Edward's sister Victoria. These incongruities call attention, often hilariously, to unconscious expectations around masculinity and femininity and disrupt any easy alignments among race, gender, and bodily presentation.

Churchill regularly writes plays inspired by current events, including *Serious Money* (1987), about the excesses of the financial industry, and the science-fictional *A Number* (2002), in which a father must come to terms with his three sons, two of whom are clones of the first. The play engaged the conversation around biotechnology and ethics sparked by the 1996 cloning of Dolly the sheep. *Love and Information* (2012), a work about modern forms of communication, introduced randomization into its staging. The play involves one hundred characters played by fifteen actors and is made up of scenes that range from twenty-five seconds to a few minutes long. These scenes unfold across seven sections of the play, but can be staged in different orders within each section at the discretion of the director. Churchill's experiments with length continue in *Ding Dong the Wicked* (2013), a full-length play, which lasts just twenty minutes, and *What If If Only*, another twenty-minute play, which explores grief and loss while evoking a Scrooge-like character confronted by ghosts from the future. Many of Churchill's works have been revived: *Cloud Nine* in 2015 in New York City; the one-acts *Blue Kettle* (1997) and *Here We Go* (2015) in 2018 by the Boston Commonwealth Shakespeare Company; *Top Girls* in 2019 at the National Theatre; *A Number* in 2022 at the Old Vic for its twentieth anniversary. The Royal Court Theatre mounted a seventieth-birthday retrospective in 2008 with readings from her

plays. Churchill has won five Obies, including one for lifetime achievement, two Lucille Lortel Awards, and a Drama Critics' Circle Award.

Top Girls, included here, premiered at the Royal Court in 1982, and follows a surreal structure. The first act invites its audience to a dinner party featuring notable women from different continents and centuries. The scene recalls a famous work of installation art, *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) by American artist Judy Chicago, which gathered women from mythology and history around a table whose place settings contain biographical details of each woman ornamented by strikingly vulvar forms. Chicago's piece sought to celebrate iconic women excluded from or diminished by history books. The *Top Girls* dinner party draws on but complicates such a celebration. Here, historical, mythic, and fictional women parade into a restaurant, one by one, to mark the achievement of their host, Marlene, who has been promoted to managing director of the Top Girls employment agency in early 1980s England. The lives of these guests cannot be contained by a place setting, and as they tell their stories, details spill out on top of each other in overlapping dialogue—a technique that Churchill pioneered. Two characters are historical: Isabella Bird, a Scots-English explorer from the Victorian era, and Lady Nijo, a Japanese courtesan who has become a Buddhist monk. One is fictional: the long-suffering Patient Griselda from Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale." Another is an artist's subject: Dull Gret, a folkloric figure ready to invade Hell in Bruegel's Flemish Renaissance oil painting. Another is the stuff of legend: Pope Joan, who passed as a boy—and then Pope—until she gave birth and was martyred.

As theater critic Ben Brantley wryly noted in the *New York Times*, Churchill "saved her best for first," as this anachronistic procession of accomplished, trailblazing women, in historical dress, speak with and over each other in a raucous, energized symphony of stories. Churchill explains in "The Layout" her approach to characters' speech: it is marked typographically to indicate when a character interrupts, talks through another character's speech, or continues from a speech begun several characters earlier. Churchill

choreographs a dizzying verbal dance, dramatizing on the stage the intersections between language and the women's shared experiences. The play is typically double cast with the actresses playing the notable characters in scene 1 later becoming Marlene's 1980s-era contemporaries: co-workers, job-seekers, family members. This strategy visualizes the connection between mythic and modern women's lives and draws attention to how historical representations of female ambition and sacrifice infiltrate the more ordinary but pressing concerns of women crossing between the home and the office. Churchill moves between these settings as much as she ranges across time. The final scene of *Top Girls*, set in the kitchen of Marlene's sister Joyce, takes place a year earlier than the penultimate scene, giving the last word to the daughter that Marlene left behind in the pursuit of career advancement.

As the play moves into modern-day England, Churchill yokes complex portrayals of female empowerment to the ideological shift toward self-reliance and economic individualism enshrined in the positions of Margaret Thatcher, the first female prime minister of the United Kingdom and leader of the Conservative Party. From 1979 until 1990, Thatcher oversaw the dismantling of the English welfare state, and five years after *Top Girls* premiered, famously declared "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families." Churchill's play recognizes and wrestles with the values embedded in Thatcher's legacy as well the divisiveness inspired by the Iron Lady herself.

Top Girls

PRODUCTION NOTE

The seating order for ACT I SCENE 1 in the original production at the Royal Court was (from R.) GRET, NIJO, MARLENE, JOAN, GRISELDA, ISABELLA.

The Characters

ISABELLA BIRD (1831–1904)—lived in Edinburgh,¹ travelled extensively between the ages of 40 and 70.

LADY NIJO (b. 1258)—Japanese, was an Emperor's courtesan and later a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan.

DULL GRET—is the subject of the Brueghel painting *Dulle Griet*,² in which a woman in an apron and armour leads a crowd of women charging through hell and fighting the devils.

POPE JOAN³—disguised as a man, is thought to have been Pope between 854–856.

PATIENT GRISELDA—is the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in "The Clerk's Tale" of *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Layout

A speech usually follows the one immediately before it BUT:

- 1) When one character starts speaking before the other has finished, the point of interruption is marked / . e.g.

ISABELLA. This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco.

NIJO. In fact he was the ex-Emperor.

- 2) A character sometimes continues speaking right through another's speech: e.g.

ISABELLA. When I was forty I thought my life was over. / Oh I was pitiful. I was

NIJO. I didn't say I felt it for twenty years. Not every minute
ISABELLA. sent on a cruise for my health and felt even worse. Pains
in my bones, pins and needles . . . etc.

3) Sometimes a speech follows on from a speech earlier than the
one immediately before it, and continuity is marked *. e.g.

GRISELDA. I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in
the fields with the sheep. *

ISABELLA. I would have been well suited to minding sheep.

NIJO. And Mr Nugent went riding by.

ISABELLA. Of course not, Nijo, I mean a healthy life in the open air.

JOAN. *He just rode up while you were minding the sheep and
asked you to marry him?

where "in the fields with the sheep" is the cue to both "I would have
been" and "He just rode up."

Endnotes

- Note 1: City in Scotland.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: 1563 painting by Flemish artist Pieter Brueghel the Elder (ca. 1525–1569).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: While her reign was widely believed in and storied, scholars believe her to have been fictional.[Return to reference 3](#)

Act One

SCENE 1

Restaurant. Saturday night. There is a table with a white cloth set for dinner with six places. The lights come up on MARLENE and the Waitress.

MARLENE Excellent, yes, table for six. One of them's going to be late but we won't wait. I'd like a bottle of Frascati⁴ straight away if you've got one really cold. [*The Waitress goes.* ISABELLA BIRD *arrives.*] Here we are. Isabella.

ISABELLA Congratulations, my dear.

MARLENE Well, it's a step. It makes for a party. I haven't time for a holiday. I'd like to go somewhere exotic like you but I can't get away. I don't know how you could bear to leave Hawaii. / I'd like to lie

ISABELLA I did think of settling.

MARLENE in the sun forever, except of course I can't bear sitting still.

ISABELLA I sent for my sister Hennie to come and join me. I said, Hennie we'll live here forever and help the natives. You can buy two sirloins of beef for what a pound of chops cost in Edinburgh. And Hennie wrote back, the dear; that yes, she would come to Hawaii if I wished, but I said she had far better stay where she was. Hennie was suited to life in Tobermory.⁵

MARLENE Poor Hennie.

ISABELLA Do you have a sister?

MARLENE Yes in fact.

ISABELLA Hennie was happy. She was good. I did miss its face, my own pet. But I couldn't stay in Scotland. I loathed the constant murk.

[LADY NIJO *arrives.*]

MARLENE [*seeing her*] Ah! Nijo! [*The Waitress enters with the wine.*]

NIJO Marlene! [*to ISABELLA*] So excited when Marlene told me / you were coming.

ISABELLA I'm delighted / to meet you.

MARLENE I think a drink while we wait for the others. I think a drink anyway. What a week. [MARLENE *seats* NIJO. *The Waitress pours the wine.*]

NIJO It was always the men who used to get so drunk. I'd be one of the maidens, passing the sake.

ISABELLA I've had sake. Small hot drink. Quite fortifying after a day in the wet.

NIJO One night my father proposed three rounds of three cups, which was normal, and then the Emperor should have said three rounds of three cups, but he said three rounds of nine cups, so you can imagine.⁶ Then the Emperor passed his sake cup to my father and said, "Let the wild goose come to me this spring."

MARLENE Let the what?

NIJO It's a literary allusion to a tenth-century epic.⁷ His Majesty was very cultured.

ISABELLA This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco.⁸

NIJO In fact he was the ex-Emperor.⁹

MARLENE But he wasn't old? / Did you, Isabella?

NIJO Twenty-nine.

ISABELLA Oh it's a long story.

MARLENE Twenty-nine's an excellent age.

NIJO Well I was only fourteen and I knew he meant something but I didn't know what. He sent me an eight-layered gown and I sent it back. So when the time came I did nothing but cry. My thin gowns were badly ripped. But even that morning when he left / —he'd a green

MARLENE Are you saying he raped you?

NIJO robe with a scarlet lining and very heavily embroidered trousers, I already felt different about him. It made me uneasy. No, of course not, Marlene, I belonged to him, it was what I was brought up for from a baby. I soon found I was sad if he stayed away. It was depressing day after day not knowing when he would come. I never enjoyed taking other women to him.

ISABELLA I certainly never saw my father drunk. He was a clergyman. / And I didn't get married till I was fifty. [*The Waitress brings the menus.*]

NIJO Oh, my father was a very religious man. Just before he died he said to me, "Serve His Majesty, be respectful, if you lose his favour enter holy orders."

MARLENE But he meant stay in a convent, not go wandering round the country.

NIJO Priests were often vagrants, so why not a nun? You think I shouldn't / I still did what my father wanted.

MARLENE No no, I think you should. / I think it was wonderful.

[DULL GRET *arrives.*]

ISABELLA I tried to do what my father wanted.

MARLENE Gret, good. Nijo. Gret / I know Griselda's going to be late, but should we wait for Joan? / Let's get you a drink.

ISABELLA Hello, Gret! [*She continues to NIJO.*] I tried to be a clergyman's daughter. Needlework, music, charitable schemes. I had a tumour removed from my spine and spent a great deal of time on the sofa. I studied the metaphysical poets and hymnology¹ / I thought I enjoyed intellectual pursuits.

NIJO Ah, you like poetry. I come of a line of eight generations of poets. Father had a poem / in the anthology.

ISABELLA My father taught me Latin although I was a girl. / But really I was.

MARLENE They didn't have Latin at my school.

ISABELLA more suited to manual work. Cooking, washing, mending, riding horses. / Better than reading

NIJO Oh but I'm sure you're very clever.

ISABELLA books, eh Gret? A rough life in the open air.

NIJO I can't say I enjoyed my rough life. What I enjoyed most was being the Emperor's favourite / and wearing thin silk.

ISABELLA Did you have any horses, Gret?

GRET Pig.

[POPE JOAN *arrives.*]

MARLENE Oh Joan, thank God, we can order. Do you know everyone?
We were just talking about learning Latin and being clever girls.
Joan way by way of an infant prodigy. Of course you were. What
excited you when you were ten?

JOAN Because angels are without matter they are not individuals.
Every angel is a species.²

MARLENE There you are. [*They laugh. They look at the menus.*]

ISABELLA Yes, I forgot all my Latin. But my father was the
mainspring of my life and when he died I was so grieved. I'll have
the chicken, please, / and the soup.

NIJO Of course you were grieved. My father was saying his prayers
and he dozed off in the sun. So I touched his knee to rouse him.
"I wonder what will happen," he said, and then he was dead
before he finished the sentence. / If he'd

MARLENE What a shock.

NIJO died saying his prayers he would have gone straight to
heaven. / Waldorf salad³

JOAN Death is the return of all creatures to God.

NIJO I shouldn't have woken him.

JOAN Damnation only means ignorance of the truth. I was always
attracted by the teachings of John the Scot,⁴ though he was
inclined to confuse / God and the world.

ISABELLA Grief always overwhelmed me at the time.

MARLENE What I fancy is a rare steak. Gret?

ISABELLA I am of course a member of the / Church of England.⁵

MARLENE Gret?

GRET Potatoes.

MARLENE I haven't been to church for years. / I like Christmas carols.

ISABELLA Good works matter more than church attendance.

MARLENE Make that two steaks and a lot of potatoes. Rare. But I
don't do good works either.

JOAN Canelloni,⁶ please, / and a salad.

ISABELLA Well, I tried, but oh dear. Hennie did good works.

NIJO The first half of my life was all sin and the second / all
repentance.*

MARLENE Oh what about starters?

GRET Soup.

JOAN *And which did you like best?

MARLENE Were your travels just a penance? Avocado vinaigrette.

Didn't you / enjoy yourself?

JOAN Nothing to start with for me, thank you.

NIJO Yes, but I was very unhappy. / It hurt to remember the past.

MARLENE And the wine list.

NIJO I think that was repentance.

MARLENE Well I wonder.

NIJO I might have just been homesick.

MARLENE Or angry.

NIJO Not angry, no, / why angry?

GRET Can we have some more bread?

MARLENE Don't you get angry? I get angry.

NIJO But what about?

MARLENE Yes let's have two more Frascati. And some more bread,
please. [*The Waitress exits.*]

ISABELLA I tried to understand Buddhism when I was in Japan but all
this birth and death succeeding each other through eternities just
filled me with the most profound melancholy. I do like something
more active.

NIJO You couldn't say I was inactive. I walked every day for twenty
years.

ISABELLA I don't mean walking. / I mean in the head.

NIJO I vowed to copy five Mahayana sutras.⁷ / Do you know how
long they are?

MARLENE I don't think religious beliefs are something we have in
common. Activity yes. [GRET *empties the bread basket into her
apron.*]

NIJO My head was active. / My head ached.

JOAN It's no good being active in heresy.

ISABELLA What heresy? She's calling the Church of England / a
heresy.

JOAN There are some very attractive / heresies.

NIJO I had never heard of Christianity. Never / heard of it.
Barbarians.

MARLENE Well I'm not a Christian. / And I'm not a Buddhist.

ISABELLA You have heard of it?

MARLENE We don't all have to believe the same.

ISABELLA I knew coming to dinner with a Pope we should keep off
religion.

JOAN I always enjoy a theological argument. But I won't try to
convert you, I'm not a missionary. Anyway I'm a heresy myself.

ISABELLA There are some barbaric practices in the east.

NIJO Barbaric?

ISABELLA Among the lower classes.

NIJO I wouldn't know.

ISABELLA Well theology always made my head ache.

MARLENE Oh good, some food. [*The Waitress brings the first course,
serves it during the following, then exits.*]

NIJO How else could I have left the court if I wasn't a nun? When
father died I had only His Majesty. So when I fell out of favour I
had nothing. Religion is a kind of nothing / and I dedicated what
was left of me to nothing.

ISABELLA That's what I mean about Buddhism. It doesn't brace.

MARLENE Come on, Nijo, have some wine.

NIJO Haven't you ever felt like that? You've all felt / like that.
Nothing will ever happen again. I am dead already.

ISABELLA You thought your life was over but it wasn't.

JOAN You wish it was over.

GRET Sad.

MARLENE Yes, when I first came to London I sometimes . . . and
when I got back from America I did. But only for a few hours. Not
twenty years.

ISABELLA When I was forty I thought my life was over. / Oh I was
pitiful. I was sent

NIJO I didn't say I felt it for twenty years. Not every minute.

ISABELLA on a cruise for my health and I felt even worse. Pains in
my bones, pins and needles in my hands, swelling behind the
ears, and—oh, stupidity. I shook all over, indefinable terror. And

Australia seemed to me a hideous country, the acacias⁸ stank like drains. / I

NIJO You were homesick. [GRET *steals a bottle of wine.*]

ISABELLA had a photograph taken for Hennie but I told her I wouldn't send it, my hair had fallen out and my clothes were crooked, I looked completely insane and suicidal.

NIJO So did I, exactly, dressed as a nun. / I was wearing walking shoes for the first time.

ISABELLA I longed to go home, / but home to what? Houses are so perfectly dismal.*

NIJO I longed to go back ten years.

MARLENE *I thought travelling cheered you both up.

ISABELLA Oh it did / of course. It was on

NIJO I'm not a cheerful person, Marlene. I just laugh a lot.

ISABELLA the trip from Australia to the Sandwich Isles,⁹ I fell in love with the sea. There were rats in the cabin and ants in the food but suddenly it was like a new world. I woke up every morning happy, knowing there would be nothing to annoy me. No nervousness. No dressing.

NIJO Don't you like getting dressed? I adored my clothes. / When I was chosen

MARLENE You had prettier colours than Isabella.

NIJO to give sake to His Majesty's brother, the Emperor Kameyana,¹ on his formal visit, I wore raw silk pleated trousers and a seven-layered gown in shades of red, and two outer garments, / yellow lined with green

MARLENE Yes, all that silk must have been very—[*The Waitress enters, clears the first course and exits.*]

JOAN I dressed as a boy when I left home.*

NIJO and a light green jacket. Lady Betto² had a five-layered gown in shades of green and purple.

ISABELLA *You dressed as a boy?

MARLENE Of course, / for safety.

JOAN It was easy, I was only twelve. / Also women weren't allowed in the library. We wanted to study in Athens.³

MARLENE You ran away alone?

JOAN No, not alone, I went with my friend. / He was

NIJO Ah, an elopement.

JOAN sixteen but I thought I knew more science than he did and almost as much philosophy.

ISABELLA Well I always travelled as a lady and I repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press that I was other than feminine.

MARLENE I don't wear trousers in the office. / I could but I don't.

ISABELLA There was no great danger to a woman of my age and appearance.

MARLENE And you got away with it, Joan?

JOAN I did then. [*The Waitress brings in the main course.*]

MARLENE And nobody noticed anything?

JOAN They noticed I was a very clever boy. / And

MARLENE I couldn't have kept pretending for so long.

JOAN when I shared a bed with my friend, that was ordinary—two poor students in a lodging house. I think I forgot I was pretending.

ISABELLA Rocky Mountain Jim, Mr Nugent,⁴ showed me no disrespect. He found it interesting, I think, that I could make scones and also lasso cattle. Indeed he declared his love for me, which was most distressing.

NIJO What did he say? / We always sent poems first.

MARLENE What did you say?

ISABELLA I urged him to give up whisky, / but he said it was too late.

MARLENE Oh Isabella.

ISABELLA He had lived alone in the mountains for many years.

MARLENE But did you—? [*The Waitress goes.*]

ISABELLA Mr Nugent was a man that any woman might love but none could marry. I came back to England.

NIJO Did you write him a poem when you left? / Snow on the mountains. My sleeves

MARLENE Did you never see him again?

ISABELLA No, never.

NIJO are wet with tears. In England no tears, no snow.

ISABELLA Well, I say never. One morning very early in Switzerland, it was a year later, I had a vision of him as I last saw him / in his trapper's clothes with his

NIJO A ghost!

ISABELLA hair round his face, and that was the day, / I learnt later, he died with a

NIJO Ah!

ISABELLA bullet in his brain. / He just bowed to me and vanished.

MARLENE Oh Isabella.

NIJO When your lover dies—One of my lovers died. / The priest Ariake.⁵

JOAN My friend died. Have we all got dead lovers?

MARLENE Not me, sorry.

NIJO [*to ISABELLA*] I wasn't a nun, I was still at court, but he was a priest, and when he came to me he dedicated his whole life to hell. / He knew that when he died he would fall into one of the three lower realms. And he died, he did die.

JOAN [*to MARLENE*] I'd quarrelled with him over the teachings of John the Scot, who held that our ignorance of God is the same as his ignorance of himself. He only knows what he creates because he creates everything he knows but he himself is above being—do you follow?

MARLENE No, but go on.

NIJO I couldn't bear to think / in what shape would he be reborn.*

JOAN St Augustine maintained that the Neo-Platonic Ideas are indivisible⁶

ISABELLA *Buddhism is really most uncomfortable.

JOAN from God, but I agreed with John that the created world is essences derived from Ideas which derived from God. As Denys the Areopagite said—the pseudo-Denys—first we give God a name, then deny it, / then reconcile the contradiction

NIJO In what shape would he return?

JOAN by looking beyond / those terms—

MARLENE Sorry, what? Denys said what?

JOAN Well we disagreed about it, we quarrelled. And next day he was ill, / I was so annoyed with him

NIJO Misery in this life and worse in the next, all because of me.

JOAN all the time I was nursing him I kept going over the arguments in my mind. Matter is not a means of knowing the essence. The source of the species is the Idea. But then I realized he'd never understand my arguments again, and that night he died. John the Scot held that the individual disintegrates / and there is no personal immortality.

ISABELLA I wouldn't have you think I was in love with Jim Nugent. It was yearning to save him that I felt.

MARLENE [to JOAN] So what did you do?

JOAN First I decided to stay a man. I was used to it. And I wanted to devote my life to learning. Do you know why I went to Rome? Italian men didn't have beards.

ISABELLA The loves of my life were Hennie, my own pet, and my dear husband the doctor, who nursed Hennie in her last illness. I knew it would be terrible when Hennie died but I didn't know how terrible. I felt half of myself had gone. How could I go on my travels without that sweet soul waiting at home for my letters? It was Doctor Bishop's devotion to her in her last illness that made me decide to marry him. He and Hennie had the same sweet character. I had not.

NIJO I thought His Majesty had sweet character because when he found out about Ariake he was so kind. But really it was because he no longer cared for me. One night he even sent me out to a man who had been pursuing me. / He lay awake on the other side of the screens and listened.

ISABELLA I did wish marriage had seemed more of a step. I tried very hard to cope with the ordinary drudgery of life. I was ill again with carbuncles⁷ on the spine and nervous prostration. I ordered a tricycle, that was my idea of adventure then. And John himself fell ill, with erysipelas and anaemia.⁸ I began to love him with my whole heart but it was too late. He was a skeleton with transparent white hands. I wheeled him on various seafronts in a

bathchair. And he faded and left me. There was nothing in my life. The doctors said I had gout / and my heart was much affected.

NIJO There was nothing in my life, nothing, without the Emperor's favour. The Empress had always been my enemy, Marlene, she said I had no right to wear three-layered gowns. / But I was the adopted daughter of my grandfather the Prime Minister. I had been publicly granted permission to wear thin silk.

JOAN There was nothing in my life except my studies. I was obsessed with pursuit of the truth. I taught at the Greek School in Rome, which St Augustine had made famous. I was poor, I worked hard, I spoke apparently brilliantly, I was still very young, I was a stranger, suddenly I was quite famous, I was everyone's favourite. Huge crowds came to hear me. The day after they made me cardinal I fell ill and lay two weeks without speaking, full of terror and regret. / But then I got up determined to

MARLENE Yes, success is very . . .

JOAN go on. I was seized again / with a desperate longing for the absolute.

ISABELLA Yes, yes, to go on. I sat in Tobermory among Hennie's flowers and sewed a complete outfit in Jaeger flannel.⁹ I was fifty-six years old.

NIJO Out of favour but I didn't die. I left on foot, nobody saw me go. For the next twenty years I walked through Japan.

GRET Walking is good. [*Meanwhile, the Waitress enters, pours lots of wine, then shows* MARLENE *the empty bottle.*]

JOAN Pope Leo¹ died and I was chosen. All right then. I would be Pope. I would know God. I would know everything.

ISABELLA I determined to leave my grief behind and set off for Tibet.

MARLENE Magnificent all of you. We need some more wine, please, two bottles I think, Griselda isn't even here yet, and I want to drink a toast to you all. [*The Waitress exits.*]

ISABELLA To yourself surely, / we're here to celebrate your success.

NIJO Yes, Marlene.

JOAN Yes, what is it exactly, Marlene?

MARLENE Well it's not Pope but it is managing director.*

JOAN And you find work for people.

MARLENE Yes, an employment agency.

NIJO *Over all the women you work with. And the men.

ISABELLA And very well deserved too. I'm sure it's just the beginning of something extraordinary.

MARLENE Well it's worth a party.

ISABELLA To Marlene.*

MARLENE And all of us.

JOAN *Marlene.

NIJO Marlene.

GRET Marlene.

MARLENE We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements. [*They laugh and drink a toast.*]

ISABELLA Such adventures. We were crossing a mountain pass at seven thousand feet, the cook was all to pieces, the muleteers suffered fever and snow blindness.² But even though my spine was agony I managed very well.*

MARLENE Wonderful.

NIJO *Once I was ill for four months lying alone at an inn. Nobody to offer a horse to Buddha. I had to live for myself, and I did live.

ISABELLA Of course you did. It was far worse returning to Tobermory. I always felt dull when I was stationary. / That's why I could never stay anywhere.

NIJO Yes, that's it exactly. New sights. The shrine by the beach, the moon shining on the sea. The goddess had vowed to save all living things. / She would even save the fishes. I was full of hope.

JOAN I had thought the Pope would know everything. I thought God would speak to me directly. But of course he knew I was a woman.

MARLENE But nobody else even suspected? [*The Waitress brings more wine and then exits.*]

JOAN In the end I did take a lover again.*

ISABELLA In the vatican?³

GRET *Keep you warm.

NIJO *Ah, lover.

MARLENE *Good for you.

JOAN He was one of my chamberlains.⁴ There are such a lot of servants when you're Pope. The food's very good. And I realized I did know the truth. Because whatever the Pope says, that's true.

NIJO What was he like, the chamberlain?*

GRET Big cock.

ISABELLA Oh, Gret.

MARLENE *Did he fancy you when he thought you were a fella?

NIJO What was he like?

JOAN He could keep a secret.

MARLENE So you did know everything.

JOAN Yes, I enjoyed being Pope. I consecrated bishops and let people kiss my feet. I received the King of England when he came to submit to the church. Unfortunately there were earthquakes, and some village reported it had rained blood, and in France there was a plague of giant grasshoppers, but I don't think that can have been my fault, do you?*

⁵ [*laughter*] The grasshoppers fell on the English Channel / and were washed up on shore

NIJO I once went to sea. It was very lonely. I realized it made very little difference where I went.

JOAN and their bodies rotted and poisoned the air and everyone in those parts died. [*laughter*]

ISABELLA *Such superstition! I was nearly murdered in China by a howling mob. They thought the barbarians ate babies and put them under railway sleepers to make the tracks steady, and ground up their eyes to make the lenses of cameras. / So they were shouting,

MARLENE And you had a camera!

ISABELLA "Child-eater, child-eater." Some people tried to sell girl babies to Europeans for cameras or stew! [*laughter*]

MARLENE So apart from the grasshoppers it was a great success.

JOAN Yes, if it hadn't been for the baby I expect I'd have lived to an old age like Theodora of Alexandria,⁶ who lived as a monk. She

was accused by a girl / who fell in love with her of being the father of her child and—

NIJO But tell us what happened to your baby. I had some babies.

MARLENE Didn't you think of getting rid of it?

JOAN Wouldn't that be a worse sin than having it? / But a Pope with a child was about as bad as possible.

MARLENE I don't know, you're the Pope.

JOAN But I wouldn't have known how to get rid of it.

MARLENE Other Popes had children, surely.

JOAN They didn't give birth to them.

NIJO Well you were a woman.

JOAN Exactly and I shouldn't have been a woman. Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope.

MARLENE So the only thing to do / was to get rid of it somehow.

NIJO You had to have it adopted secretly.

JOAN But I didn't know what was happening. I thought I was getting fatter, but then I was eating more and sitting about, the life of a Pope is quite luxurious. I don't think I'd spoken to a woman since I was twelve. The chamberlain was the one who realized.

MARLENE And by then it was too late.

JOAN Oh I didn't want to pay attention. It was easier to do nothing.

NIJO But you had to plan for having it. You had to say you were ill and go away.

JOAN That's what I should have done I suppose.

MARLENE Did you want them to find out?

NIJO I too was often in embarrassing situations, there's no need for a scandal. My first child was His Majesty's, which unfortunately died, but my second was Akebono's. I was seventeen. He was in love with me when I was thirteen, he was very upset when I had to go to the Emperor, it was very romantic, a lot of poems. Now His Majesty hadn't been near me for two months so he thought I was four months pregnant when I was really six, so when I reached the ninth month / I announced I was seriously ill,

JOAN I never knew what month it was.

NIJO and Akebono announced he had gone on a religious retreat. He held me round the waist and lifted me up as the baby was born. He cut the cord with a short sword, wrapped the baby in white and took it away. It was only a girl but I was sorry to lose it. Then I told the Emperor that the baby had miscarried because of my illness, and there you are. The danger was past.

JOAN But, Nijo, I wasn't used to having a woman's body.

ISABELLA So what happened?

JOAN I didn't know of course that it was near the time. It was Rogation Day,² there was always a procession. I was on the horse dressed in my robes and a cross was carried in front of me, and all the cardinals were following, and all the clergy of Rome, and a huge crowd of people. / We set off from St Peter's to go

MARLENE Total Pope. [GRET *pours the wine and steals the bottle.*]

JOAN to St John's. I had felt a slight pain earlier, I thought it was something I'd eaten, and then it came back, and came back more often. I thought when this is over I'll go to bed. There were still long gaps when I felt perfectly all right and I didn't want to attract attention to myself and spoil the ceremony. Then I suddenly realized what it must be. I had to last out till I could get home and hide. Then something changed, my breath started to catch, I couldn't plan things properly any more. We were in a little street that goes between St Clement's and the Colosseum, and I just had to get off the horse and sit down for a minute. Great waves of pressure were going through my body, I heard sounds like a cow lowing, they came out of my mouth. Far away I heard people screaming, "The Pope is ill, the Pope is dying." And the baby just slid out on to the road.*

MARLENE The cardinals / won't have known where to put themselves.

NIJO Oh dear, Joan, what a thing to do! In the street!

ISABELLA *How embarrassing.

GRET In a field, yah. [*They are laughing.*]

JOAN One of the cardinals said, "The Antichrist!" and fell over in a faint. [*They all laugh.*]

MARLENE So what did they do? They weren't best pleased.

JOAN They took me by the feet and dragged me out of town and stoned me to death. [*They stop laughing.*]

MARLENE Joan, how horrible.

JOAN I don't really remember.

NIJO And the child died too?

JOAN Oh yes, I think so, yes. [*The Waitress enters to clear the plates. Pause. They start talking very quietly.*]

ISABELLA [*to JOAN*] I never had any children. I was very fond of horses.

NIJO [*to MARLENE*] I saw my daughter once. She was three years old. She wore a plum-red / small sleeved gown. Akebono's⁸ wife

ISABELLA Birdie was my favourite. A little Indian bay mare⁹ I rode in the Rocky Mountains.

NIJO had taken the child because her own died. Everyone thought I was just a visitor. She was being brought up carefully so she could be sent to the palace like I was. [*GRET steals her empty plate.*]

ISABELLA Legs of iron and always cheerful, and such a pretty face. If a stranger led her she reared up like a bronco.

NIJO I never saw my third child after he was born, the son of Ariake the priest. Ariake held him on his lap the day he was born and talked to him as if he could understand, and cried. My fourth child was Ariake's too. Ariake died before he was born. I didn't want to see anyone, I stayed alone in the hills. It was a boy again, my third son. But oddly enough I felt nothing for him.

MARLENE How many children did you have, Gret?

GRET Ten.

ISABELLA Whenever I came back to England I felt I had so much to atone for. Hennie and John were so good. I did no good in my life. I spent years in self-gratification. So I hurled myself into committees, I nursed the people of Tobermory in the epidemic of influenza, I lectured the Young Women's Christian Association on Thrift.¹ I talked and talked explaining how the East was corrupt and vicious. My travels must do good to someone beside myself. I wore myself out with good causes.

MARLENE [*pause*] Oh God, why are we all so miserable?

JOAN [*pause*] The procession never went down that street again.

MARLENE They rerouted it specially?

JOAN Yes they had to go all round to avoid it. And they introduced a pierced chair.²

MARLENE A pierced chair?

JOAN Yes, a chair made out of solid marble with a hole in the seat / and it was

MARLENE You're not serious.

JOAN in the Chapel of the Saviour, and after he was elected the Pope had to sit in it.

MARLENE And someone looked up his skirts? / Not really!

ISABELLA What an extraordinary thing.

JOAN Two of the clergy / made sure he was a man.

NIJO On their hands and knees!

MARLENE A pierced chair!

GRET Balls!

[GRISelda *arrives unnoticed.*]

NIJO Why couldn't he just pull up his robe?

JOAN He had to sit there and look dignified.

MARLENE You could have made all your chamberlains sit in it.*

GRET Big one. Small one.

NIJO Very useful chair at court.

ISABELLA *Or the Laird of Tobermory in his kilt.³

[*They are quite drunk. They get the giggles. MARLENE notices GRISelda and gets up to welcome her. The others go on talking and laughing. GRET crosses to JOAN and ISABELLA and pours them wine from her stolen bottles. The Waitress gives out the menus.*]

MARLENE Griselda! / There you are. Do you want to eat?

GRISelda I'm sorry I'm so late. No, no, don't bother.

MARLENE Of course it's no bother. / Have you eaten?

GRISelda No really, I'm not hungry.

MARLENE Well have some pudding.

GRISELDA I never eat pudding.

MARLENE Griselda, I hope you're not anorexic.⁴ We're having pudding, I am, and getting nice and fat.

GRISELDA Oh if everyone is. I don't mind.

MARLENE Now who do you know? This is Joan who was Pope in the ninth century, and Isabella Bird, the Victorian traveller, and Lady Nijo from Japan, Emperor's concubine and Buddhist nun, thirteenth century, nearer your own time, and Gret who was painted by Brueghel. Griselda's in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage.⁵ I'd like profiteroles⁶ because they're disgusting.

JOAN Zabaglione,⁷ please.

ISABELLA Apple pie / and cream.

NIJO What's this?

MARLENE Zabaglione, it's Italian, it's what Joan's having, / it's delicious.

NIJO A Roman Catholic / dessert? Yes please.

MARLENE Gret?

GRET Cake.

GRISELDA Just cheese and biscuits, thank you. [*The Waitress exits.*]

MARLENE Yes, Griselda's life is like a fairy story, except it starts with marrying the prince.

GRISELDA He's only a marquis, Marlene.

MARLENE Well everyone for miles around is his liege and he'd absolute lord of life and death and you were the poor but beautiful peasant girl and he whisked you off. / Near enough a prince.

NIJO How old were you?

GRISELDA Fifteen.

NIJO I was brought up in court circles and it was still a shock. Had you ever seen him before?

GRISELDA I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in the fields with the sheep.*

ISABELLA I would have been well suited to minding sheep.

NIJO And Mr Nugent riding by.

ISABELLA Of course not, Nijo, I mean a healthy life in the open air.

JOAN *He just rode up while you were minding the sheep and asked you to marry him?

GRISELDA No, no, it was on the wedding day. I was waiting outside the door to see the procession. Everyone wanted him to get married so there'd be an heir to look after us when he died, / and at last he

MARLENE I don't think Walter wanted to get married. It is Walter? Yes.

GRISELDA announced a day for the wedding but nobody knew who the bride was, we thought it must be a foreign princess, we were longing to see her. Then the carriage stopped outside our cottage and we couldn't see the bride anywhere. And he came and spoke to my father.

NIJO And your father told you to serve the Prince.

GRISELDA My father could hardly speak. The Marquis said it wasn't an order, I could say no, but if I said yes I must always obey him in everything.

MARLENE That's when you should have suspected.

GRISELDA But of course a wife must obey her husband. / And of course I must obey the Marquis.*

ISABELLA I swore to obey dear John, of course, but it didn't seem to arise. Naturally I wouldn't have wanted to go abroad while I was married.

MARLENE *Then why bother to mention it at all? He'd got a thing about it, that's why.

GRISELDA I'd rather obey the Marquis than a boy from the village.

MARLENE Yes, that's a point.

JOAN I never obeyed anyone. They all obeyed me.

NIJO And what did you wear? He didn't make you get married in your own clothes? That would be perverse.*

MARLENE Oh, you wait.

GRISELDA *He had ladies with him who undressed me and they had a white silk dress and jewels for my hair.

MARLENE And at first he seemed perfectly normal?

GRISELDA Marlene, you're always so critical of him. / Of course he was normal, he was very kind.

MARLENE But, Griselda, come on, he took your baby.
GRISELDA Walter found it hard to believe I loved him. He couldn't believe I would always obey him. He had to prove it.
MARLENE I don't think Walter likes women.
GRISELDA I'm sure he loved me, Marlene, all the time.
MARLENE He just had a funny way / of showing it.
GRISELDA It was hard for him too.
JOAN How do you mean he took away your baby?
NIJO Was it a boy?
GRISELDA No, the first one was a girl.
NIJO Even so it's hard when they take it away. Did you see it at all?
GRISELDA Oh yes, she was six weeks old.
NIJO Much better to do it straight away.
ISABELLA But why did your husband take the child?
GRISELDA He said all the people hated me because I was just one of them. And now I had a child they were restless. So he had to get rid of the child to keep them quiet. But he said he wouldn't snatch her, I had to agree and obey and give her up. So when I was feeding her a man came in and took her away. I thought he was going to kill her even before he was out of the room.
MARLENE But you let him take her? You didn't struggle?
GRISELDA I asked him to give her back so I could kiss he. And I asked him to bury her where no animals could dig her up. / It was Walter's child to do what he
ISABELLA Oh, my dear.
GRISELDA liked with.*
MARLENE Walter was bonkers.
GRET Bastard.
ISABELLA *But surely, murder.
GRISELDA I had promised.
MARLENE I can't stand this. I'm going for a pee.

[MARLENE *goes out. The Waitress brings the dessert, serves it during the following, then exits.*]

NIJO No, I understand. Of course you had to, he was your life. And were you in favour after that?

GRISELDA Oh yes, we were very happy together. We never spoke about what had happened.

ISABELLA I can see you were doing what you thought was your duty. But didn't it make you ill?

GRISELDA No, I was very well, thank you.

NIJO And you had another child?

GRISELDA Not for four years, but then I did, yes, a boy.

NIJO Ah a boy. / So it all ended happily.

GRISELDA Yes he was pleased. I kept my son till he was two years old. A peasant's grandson. It made the people angry. Walter explained.

ISABELLA But surely he wouldn't kill his children / just because—

GRISELDA Oh it wasn't true. Walter would never give in to the people. He wanted to see if I loved him enough.

JOAN He killed his children / to see if you loved him enough?

NIJO Was it easier the second time or harder?

GRISELDA It was always easy because I always knew I would do what he said. [*Pause. They start to eat.*]

ISABELLA I hope you didn't have any more children.

GRISELDA Oh no, no more. It was twelve years till he tested me again.

ISABELLA So whatever did he do this time? / My poor John, I never loved him enough, and he would never have dreamt . . .

GRISELDA He sent me away. He said the people wanted him to marry someone else who'd give him an heir and he'd got special permission from the Pope. So I said I'd go home to my father. I came with nothing / so I went with nothing. I took

NIJO Better to leave if your master doesn't want you.

GRISELDA off my clothes. He let me keep a slip so he wouldn't be shamed. And I walked home barefoot. My father came out in tears. Everyone was crying except me.

NIJO At least your father wasn't dead. / I had nobody.

ISABELLA Well it can be a relief to come home. I loved to see Hennie's sweet face again.

GRISELDA Oh yes, I was perfectly content. And quite soon he sent for me again.

JOAN I don't think I would have gone.

GRISELDA But he told me to come. I had to obey him. He wanted me to help prepare his wedding. He was getting married to a young girl from France / and nobody except me knew how to arrange things the way he liked them.

NIJO It's always hard taking him another woman. [MARLENE *comes back.*]

JOAN I didn't live a woman's life. I don't understand it.

GRISELDA The girl was sixteen and far more beautiful than me. I could see why he loved her. / She had her younger brother with her as a page. [*The Waitress enters.*]

MARLENE Oh God, I can't bear it. I want some coffee. Six coffees. Six brandies. / Double brandies. Straightaway. [*The Waitress exits.*]

GRISELDA They all went into the feast I'd prepared. And he stayed behind and put his arms round me and kissed me. / I felt half asleep with the shock.

NIJO Oh, like a dream.

MARLENE And he said, "This is your daughter and your son."

GRISELDA Yes.

JOAN What?

NIJO Oh. Oh I see. You got them back.

ISABELLA I did think it was remarkably barbaric to kill them but you learn not to say anything. / So he had them brought up secretly I suppose.

MARLENE Walter's a monster. Weren't you angry? What did you do?

GRISELDA Well I fainted. Then I cried and kissed the children. / Everyone was making a fuss of me.

NIJO But did you feel anything for them?

GRISELDA What?

NIJO Did you feel anything for the children?

GRISELDA Of course, I loved them.

JOAN So you forgave him and lived with him?

GRISELDA He suffered so much all those years.

ISABELLA Hennie had the same sweet nature.

NIJO So they dressed you again?

GRISELDA Cloth of gold.

JOAN I can't forgive anything.

MARLENE You really are exceptional, Griselda.

NIJO Nobody gave me back my children. [*She cries.*]

[*The Waitress brings the brandies and then exits. During the following, JOAN goes to NIJO.*]

ISABELLA I can never be like Hennie. I was always so busy in England, a kind of business I detested. The very presence of people exhausted my emotional reserves. I could not be like Hennie however I tried. I tried Full p. F-921 Shorter p. 1517 and was as ill as could be. The doctor suggested a steel net to support my head, the weight of my own head was too much for my diseased spine. It is dangerous to put oneself in depressing circumstances. Why should I do it?

JOAN [*to NIJO*] Don't cry.

NIJO My father and the Emperor both died in the autumn. So much pain.

JOAN Yes, but don't cry.

NIJO They wouldn't let me into the palace when he was dying. I hid in the room with his coffin, then I couldn't find where I'd left my shoes, I ran after the funeral procession in bare feet, I couldn't keep up. When I got there it was over, a few wisps of smoke in the sky, that's all that was left of him. What I want to know is, if I'd still been at court, would I have been allowed to wear full mourning?

MARLENE I'm sure you would.

NIJO Why do you say that? You don't know anything about it. Would I have been allowed to wear full mourning?

ISABELLA How can people live in this dim pale island and wear our hideous clothes? I cannot and will not live the life of a lady.

NIJO I'll tell you something that made me angry. I was eighteen, at the Full Moon Ceremony. They make a special rice gruel and stir it with their sticks, and then they beat their women across the loins so they'll have sons and not daughters. So the Emperor beat us all / very hard as

MARLENE What a sod. [*The Waitress enters with the coffees.*]

NIJO usual—that's not it, Marlene, that's normal, what made us angry he told his attendants they could beat us too. Well they had a wonderful time. / So Lady Genki and I made a plan, and the ladies

MARLENE I'd like another brandy, please. Better make it six. [*The Waitress exits.*]

NIJO all hid in his rooms, and Lady Mashimizu⁸ stood guard with a stick at the door, and when His Majesty came in Genki seized him and I beat him till he cried out and promised he would never order anyone to hit us again. Afterwards there was a terrible fuss. The nobles were horrified. "We wouldn't even dream of stepping on Your Majesty's shadow." And I had hit him with a stick. Yes, I hit him with a stick.

[*The Waitress brings the brandy bottle and tops up the glasses. JOAN crosses in front of the table and back to her place while drunkenly reciting:*]

JOAN Suave, mari magno turantibus aequora ventis,
e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;
non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,
sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.
Suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri
per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.
Sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere
edita doctrina sapientum templa serena,
despicere unde queas alios passimque videre
errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,

GRISELDA I do think—I do wonder—it would have been nicer if Walter hadn't had to.

ISABELLA Why should I? Why should I?

MARLENE Of course not.

NIJO I hit him with a stick.

JOAN certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore
ad summas emergere opes rerumque potiri.
O miseras hominum mentis, / o pectora caeca!*

ISABELLA O miseras!

NIJO *Pectora caeca!

JOAN qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periclis degitur hoc aevi quoducmquest! / none videre nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mente fruatur . . . [*She subsides.*]⁹

GRET We come to hell through a big mouth. Hell's black and red. / It's

MARLENE [*to JOAN*] Shut up, pet.

GRISELDA Hush, please.

ISABELLA Listen, she's been to hell.

GRET like the village where I come from. There's a river and a bridge and houses. There's places on fire like when the soldiers come. There's a big devil sat on a roof with a big hole in his arse and he's scooping stuff out of it with a big ladle and it's falling down on us, and it's money, so a lot of the women stop and get some. But most of us is fighting the devils. There's lots of little devils, our size, and we get them down all right and give them a beating. There's lots of funny creatures round your feet, you don't like to look, like rats and lizards, and nasty things, a bum with a face, and fish with legs, and faces on things that don't have faces on. But they don't hurt, you just keep going. Well we'd had worse, you see, we'd had the Spanish.¹ We'd all had family killed. My big son die on a wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run her through with a sword. I'd had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards. I come out of my front door that morning and shout till my neighbours come out and I said, "Come on, we're going where the evil come from and pay the bastards out." And they all come out just as they was / from baking or

NIJO All the ladies come.

GRET washing in their aprons, and we push down the street and the ground opens up and we go through a big mouth into a street just like ours but in hell. I've got a sword in my hand from somewhere and I fill a basket with gold cups they drink out of down there.

You just keep running on and fighting, / you didn't stop for nothing. Oh we give them devils such a beating.*

NIJO Take that, take that.

JOAN *Something something something mortisque timores
tum vaccum pectus—damn.
Quod si ridicula—
something something on and on and on
and something splendorem purpureai.²

ISABELLA I thought I would have a last jaunt up the west river in China.³ Why not? But the doctors were so very grave I just went to Morocco. The sea was so wild I had to be landed by ship's crane in a coal bucket. / My horse was a terror to me, a powerful black charger.

GRET Coal bucket good.

JOAN nos in luce timemus
something
terrorem⁴

[NIJO *is laughing and crying*. JOAN *gets up and is sick*. GRISELDA *looks after her*.]

GRISELDA Can I have some water, please? [*The Waitress exits*.]

ISABELLA So off I went to visit the Berber sheikhs⁵ in full blue trousers and great brass spurs. I was the only European woman ever to have seen the Emperor of Morocco. I was [*The Waitress brings the water*.] seventy years old. What lengths to go to for a last chance of joy. I knew my return of vigour was only temporary, but how marvellous while it lasted.

Endnotes

- Note 4: Wine from Frascati, Italy.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: City in Scotland.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A reference to *Towazugatari*, translated as *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*, a memoir written by Nijo in which she describes Emperor Go-Fukakusa's proposal of three rounds of

nine cups of sake as part of the celebration of her becoming his concubine in place of Nijo's mother.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: *The Tales of the Ise*. In the poem, the wild goose is a metaphor for a girl offered for marriage by her mother.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Country in western Africa.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Go-Fukakusa abdicated the throne in 1260.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Study of religious songs and hymns. "Metaphysical poets": a group of 17th-century poets who explored religion and philosophy, including figures like John Donne.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joan is referring to Christian angelology debates. She is likely referring to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 5th–6th century), who is mentioned later in the play, and his conception of angelic hierarchy from his book *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, or *On the Celestial Hierarchy*.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A fruit and nut salad, attributed to the Waldorf Hotel in New York City.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: John Scotus Eriugena (ca. 800–ca. 877), known as John the Scot. Irish philosopher and theologian in the Early Middle Ages.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: The church was a product of the English Reformation in the 16th century, when Henry VIII renounced papal authority after being denied a marriage annulment. He aligned himself with Protestants, who had broken away from the Catholic Church, and his son Edward VI further developed the theology of the new Church of England.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Cannelloni, an Italian cylindrical pasta.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Buddhist scriptures.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Type of flowering shrub, known in Australia as a wattle.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The name given to the Hawaiian Islands by James Cook in 1778.[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Emperor Go-Fukakusa abdicated the throne to his brother, Kameyana.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Another concubine of Go-Fukakusa, mentioned by Nijo in her memoir.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: City in Greece. Some reports of Joan's life say she went to Athens dressed as a man with her lover and was educated there.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: James Nugent, known as "Rocky Mountain Jim," a trapper and guide to the Estes Park area in Colorado. Isabella Bird met him when travelling in 1873, and most of what is known about him comes from her writings. It is unclear who shot and killed him, as Isabella references later, though it was likely Griffith Evans, a rival guide in the area.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Ariake no Tsuki, another lover of Nijo's mentioned in her memoir.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6:
Neoplatonism, following from Platonism, emerged in the 3rd century and greatly influenced religious scholars in the Middle Ages. While Neoplatonism is a wide set of ideas, most Neoplatonists believe in monism, or that all of reality is derived from "the One." "St Augustine": Christian theologian and philosopher (354–430) who studied Neoplatonism, which influenced his conversion to Christianity.
[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Clusters of boils under infected skin.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: An iron deficiency or lack of red blood cells.
"Erysipelas": a bacterial infection of the skin.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Gustav Jaeger (1832–1917) advocated for the use of clothing made from animal fibers like wool, instead of plant fibers like cotton, for hygienic reasons.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: St. Leo IV, who served as pope before Joan in some accounts. The historical record shows that Benedict III quickly

succeeded Leo IV's death, and that she therefore could not have reigned.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Eye damage or vision loss as a result of overexposure to UV rays, which are reflected by the snow. "Muleteers": drivers of mules.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The seat of the pope.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A papal attendant.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Reference to a passage in *The Chronicles of the Lives of the Popes and the Roman Emperors*, published in 1478 and widely reprinted. The text's popularity resulted from attribution to Petrarch, but scholars now agree he was not the author.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A 5th-century saint from Alexandria, Egypt. To do penance for adultery, she disguised herself as a man and joined a monastery. She was discovered to be a woman only after her death. Unlike her, Pope Joan is said to have been discovered as a woman once she gave birth to a child during a procession.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A day of prayer and fasting.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Yuki no Akebono, another of Nijo's lovers in her memoir.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A female horse with brown hair and black mane and tail. "Indian": refers to Native American.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Originally a philanthropic group, founded in London in 1855. "Thrift": refers to management and saving of money.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A legend not believed to be true by historians. Following the reign of a female pope, it was believed that subsequent popes were made to sit on a chair with a hole in the seat, and a cardinal would check to ensure that the pope had male genitalia.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A Scottish garment for men, resembling a skirt. "Laird": a Scottish owner of an estate.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Referring to anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder characterized by refusing to eat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5:

Griselda is the heroine of the final tale in the *Decameron* (1351–53), by the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375); the story was retold in Latin, as “One Wife’s Mythic Obedience and Faith,” by the Italian poet Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374); Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1343–1400) drew on Petrarch’s version in “The Clerk’s Tale.” As the story of her marriage goes, Walter, a man from Italy, marries the peasant Griselda only after she promises to obey him always. He proceeds to test that promise by claiming to kill her two children and contriving to divorce her. She remains patient and obedient, and he finally confesses his deceit, returns her children, and they remain in a loving marriage.

[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Cream puffs. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Italian custard dessert. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: With Lady Genki, other Imperial courtesans mentioned in Nijo’s memoir. [Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9:

Joan is reciting from Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, or *On the Nature of Things*. Translated from the Latin by W. H. D. Rouse: “Pleasant it is, when on the great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another’s great tribulation: not because any man’s troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant. Pleasant is it also to behold great encounters of warfare arrayed over the plains, with no part of yours in the peril. But nothing is more delightful than to possess lofty sanctuaries serene, well fortified by the teachings of the wise, whence you may look down upon others and behold them all astray, wandering abroad and seeking the path of life:—the strife of wits, the fight for precedence, all labouring night and day with surpassing toil to mount upon the pinnacle of riches and to lay hold on power. O pitiable minds of men, O blind intelligences! In what gloom of life, in how great perils is passed all your poor span of time! not to see that all nature barks for is this, that pain be removed away out of the body, and that the mind, kept away from care

and fear, enjoy a feeling of delight!” Joan trails off before the final line of the quotation, leaving out roughly “enjoy a feeling of delight!”

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: Under Charles V, the King of Spain, the Netherland region was united and became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Philip II inherited the lands, and the Netherlands revolted against him in the Eighty Years’ War. In 1648, the Spanish King Philip IV recognized the Independence of the Dutch Republic.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Joan continues to quote Lucretius in broken Latin. What she remembers can be roughly translated as “death’s terrors then leave your heart unpossessed—That if ridiculous—the brightness of the purple.”[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Xi River.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Let us not fear in the light—terror (Latin).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An Arab honorific for a leader. “Berber”: the Berbers are an ethnic group of North Africa, including Morocco.[Return to reference 5](#)

SCENE 2

"Top Girls" Employment Agency. Monday morning. The Lights come up on MARLENE and JEANINE.

MARLENE Right, Jeanine, you are Jeanine aren't you? Let's have a look. O's and A's.⁶ / No A's, all those

JEANINE Six O's.

MARLENE O's you probably could have got an A. / Speeds,⁷ not brilliant, not too bad.

JEANINE I wanted to go to work.

MARLENE Well, Jeanine, what's your present job like?

JEANINE I'm a secretary.

MARLENE Secretary or typist?

JEANINE I did start as a typist but the last six months I've been a secretary.

MARLENE To?

JEANINE To three of them, really, they share me. There's Mr Ashford, he's the office manager, and Mr Philby / is sales, and—

MARLENE Quite a small place?

JEANINE A bit small.

MARLENE Friendly?

JEANINE Oh it's friendly enough.

MARLENE Prospects?

JEANINE I don't think so, that's the trouble. Miss Lewis is secretary to the managing director and she's been there forever, and Mrs Bradford / is—

MARLENE So you want a job with better prospects?

JEANINE I want a change.

MARLENE So you'll take anything comparable?

JEANINE No, I do want prospects. I want more money.

MARLENE You're getting—?

JEANINE Hundred.

MARLENE It's not bad you know. You're what? Twenty?

JEANINE I'm saving to get married.

MARLENE Does that mean you don't want a long-term job, Jeanine?

JEANINE I might do.

MARLENE Because where do the prospects come in? No kids for a bit?

JEANINE Oh no, not kids, not yet.

MARLENE So you won't tell them you're getting married?

JEANINE Had I better not?

MARLENE It would probably help.

JEANINE I'm not wearing a ring. We thought we wouldn't spend on a ring.

MARLENE Saves taking it off.

JEANINE I wouldn't take it off.

MARLENE There's no need to mention it when you go for an interview. / Now, Jeanine, do you have a feel

JEANINE But what if they ask?

MARLENE for any particular kind of company?

JEANINE I thought advertising.

MARLENE People often do think advertising. I have got a few vacancies but I think they're looking for something glossier.

JEANINE You mean how I dress? / I can

MARLENE I mean experience.

JEANINE dress different. I dress like this on purpose for where I am now.

MARLENE I have a marketing department here of a knitwear manufacturer. / Marketing is near enough

JEANINE Knitwear?

MARLENE advertising. Secretary to the marketing manager, he's thirty-five, married, I've sent him a girl before and she was happy, left to have a baby, you won't want to mention marriage there. He's very fair I think, good at his job, you won't have to nurse him along. Hundred and ten, so that's better than you're doing now.

JEANINE I don't know.

MARLENE I've a fairly small concern⁸ here, father and two sons, you'd have more say potentially, secretarial and reception duties, only a hundred but the job's going to grow with the concern and

then you'll be in at the top with new girls coming in underneath you.

JEANINE What is it they do?

MARLENE Lampshades. / This would be my first choice for you.

JEANINE Just lampshades?

MARLENE There's plenty of different kinds of lampshade. So we'll send you there, shall we, and the knitwear second choice. Are you free to go for an interview any day they call you?

JEANINE I'd like to travel.

MARLENE We don't have any foreign clients. You'd have to go elsewhere.

JEANINE Yes I know. I don't really . . . I just mean . . .

MARLENE Does your fiancé want to travel?

JEANINE I'd like a job where I was here in London and with him and everything but now and then—I expect it's silly. Are there jobs like that?

MARLENE There's personal assistant to a top executive in a multinational. If that's the idea you need to be planning ahead. Is that where you want to be in ten years?

JEANINE I might not be alive in ten years.

MARLENE Yes but you will be. You'll have children.

JEANINE I can't think about ten years.

MARLENE You haven't got the speeds anyway. So I'll send you to these two shall I? You haven't been to any other agency? Just so we don't get crossed wires. Now, Jeanine, I want you to get one of these jobs, all right? If I send you that means I'm putting myself on the line for you. Your presentation's OK, you look fine, just be confident and go in there convinced that this is the best job for you and you're the best person for the job. If you don't believe it they won't believe it.

JEANINE Do you believe it?

MARLENE I think you could make me believe it if you put your mind to it.

JEANINE Yes, all right.

Endnotes

- Note 6: In the British education system, Ordinary (O) level examinations covered subject areas. After completing the O-Level exams, a student could choose to continue on to Advanced (A) level exams.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Words per minute speed, a measurement of how fast a secretary or typist can type.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: British term for a company.[Return to reference 8](#)

SCENE 3

JOYCE's back yard. Sunday afternoon. The house with a back door is US. DS.⁹ is a shelter made of junk, made by children. The Lights come up on two girls, ANGIE and KIT, who are squashed together in the shelter. ANGIE is sixteen, KIT is twelve. They cannot be seen from the house.

JOYCE [*off, calling from the house*] Angie. Angie, are you out there?

[*Silence. They keep still and wait. When nothing else happens they relax.*]

ANGIE Wish she was dead.

KIT Wanna watch *The Exterminator*?¹

ANGIE You're sitting on my leg.

KIT There's nothing on telly.² We can have an ice cream. Angie?

ANGIE Shall I tell you something?

KIT Do you wanna watch *The Exterminator*?

ANGIE It's X,³ innit?

KIT I can get into Xs.

ANGIE Shall I tell you something?

KIT We'll go to something else. We'll go to Ipswich. What's on the Odeon?⁴

ANGIE She won't let me, will she.

KIT Don't tell her.

ANGIE I've no money.

KIT I'll pay.

ANGIE She'll moan though, won't she.

KIT I'll ask her for you if you like.

ANGIE I've no money, I don't want you to pay.

KIT I'll ask her.

ANGIE She don't like you.

KIT I still got three pounds birthday money. Did she say she don't like me? I'll go by myself then.

ANGIE Your mum don't let you. I got to take you.

KIT She won't know.

ANGIE You'd be scared who'd sit next to you.

KIT No I wouldn't. She does like me anyway. Tell me then.

ANGIE Tell you what?

KIT Its you she doesn't like.

ANGIE Well I don't like her so tough shit.

JOYCE [*off*] Angie. Angie. Angie. I know you're out there. I'm not coming out after you. You come in here. [*Silence. Nothing happens.*]

ANGIE Last night when I was in bed. I been thinking yesterday could I make things move. You know, make things move by thinking about them without touching them. Last night I was in bed and suddenly a picture fell down off the wall.

KIT What picture?

ANGIE My gran, that picture. Not the poster. The photograph in the frame.

KIT Had you done something to make it fall down?

ANGIE I must have done.

KIT But were you thinking about it?

ANGIE Not about it, but about something.

KIT I don't think that's very good.

ANGIE You know the kitten?

KIT Which one?

ANGIE There only is one. The dead one.

KIT What about it?

ANGIE I heard it last night.

KIT Where?

ANGIE Out here. In the dark. What I left you here in the dark all night?

KIT You couldn't. I'd go home.

ANGIE You couldn't.

KIT I'd / go home.

ANGIE No you couldn't, not if I said.

KIT I could.

ANGIE Then you wouldn't see anything. You'd just be ignorant.

KIT I can see in the daytime.

ANGIE No you can't. You can't hear it in the daytime.

KIT I don't want to hear it.

ANGIE You're scared that's all.

KIT I'm not scared of anything.

ANGIE You're scared of blood.

KIT It's not the same kitten anyway. You just heard an old cat, / you just heard some old cat.

ANGIE You don't know what I heard. Or what I saw. You don't know nothing because you're a baby.

KIT You're sitting on me.

ANGIE Mind my hair / you silly cunt.

KIT Stupid fucking cow, I hate you.

ANGIE I don't care if you do.

KIT You're horrible.

ANGIE I'm going to kill my mother and you're going to watch.

KIT I'm not playing.

ANGIE You're scared of blood. [KIT *puts her hand under dress, brings it out with blood on her finger.*]

KIT There, see, I got my own blood, so. [ANGIE *takes KIT's hand and licks her finger.*]

ANGIE Now I'm a cannibal. I might turn into a vampire now.

KIT That picture wasn't nailed up right.

ANGIE You'll have to do that when I get mine.

KIT I don't have to.

ANGIE You're scared.

KIT I'll do it, I might do it. I don't have to just because you say. I'll be sick on you.

ANGIE I don't care if you are sick on me, I don't mind sick. I don't mind blood. If I don't get away from here I'm going to die.

KIT I'm going home.

ANGIE You can't go through the house. She'll see you.

KIT I won't tell her.

ANGIE Oh great, fine.

KIT I'll say I was by myself. I'll tell her you're at my house and I'm going there to get you.

ANGIE She knows I'm here, stupid.

KIT Then why can't I go through the house?

ANGIE Because I said not.

KIT My mum don't like you anyway.

ANGIE I don't want her to like me. She's a slag.⁵

KIT She is not.

ANGIE She does it with everyone.

KIT She does not.

ANGIE You don't even know what it is.

KIT Yes I do.

ANGIE Tell me then.

KIT We get it all at school, cleverclogs.⁶ It's on television. You haven't done it.

ANGIE How do you know?

KIT Because I know you haven't.

ANGIE You know wrong then because I have.

KIT Who with?

ANGIE I'm not telling you / who with.

KIT You haven't anyway.

ANGIE How do you know?

KIT Who with?

ANGIE I'm not telling you.

KIT You said you told me everything.

ANGIE I was lying wasn't I.

KIT Who with? You can't tell me who with because / you never—

ANGIE Sh.

[JOYCE has come out of the house. She stops half way across the yard and listens. They listen.]

JOYCE You there Angie? Kit? You there Kitty? Want a cup of tea? I've got some chocolate biscuits.⁷ Come on now I'll put the kettle on. Want a choccy biccys, Angie? *[They all listen and wait.]* Fucking rotten little cunt. You can stay there and die. I'll lock the door.

[They all wait. JOYCE goes back to the house. ANGIE and KIT sit in silence for a while.]

KIT When there's a war, where's the safest place?

ANGIE Nowhere.

KIT New Zealand⁸ is, my mum said. Your skin's burned right off.

Shall we go to New Zealand?

ANGIE I'm not staying here.

KIT Shall we go to New Zealand?

ANGIE You're not old enough.

KIT You're not old enough.

ANGIE I'm old enough to get married.

KIT You don't want to get married.

ANGIE No but I'm old enough.

KIT I'd find out where they were going to drop it and stand right in the place.

ANGIE You couldn't find out.

KIT Better than walking round with your skin dragging on the ground. Eugh. / Would you like walking round with your skin dragging on the ground?

ANGIE You couldn't find out, stupid, it's a secret.

KIT Where are you going?

ANGIE I'm not telling you.

KIT Why?

ANGIE It's a secret.

KIT But you tell me all your secrets.

ANGIE Not the true secrets.

KIT Yes you do.

ANGIE No I don't.

KIT I want to go somewhere away from the war.

ANGIE Just forget the war.

KIT I can't.

ANGIE You have to. It's so boring.

KIT I'll remember it at night.

ANGIE I'm going to do something else anyway.

KIT What? Angie, come on. Angie.

ANGIE It's a true secret.

KIT It can't be worse than the kitten. And killing your mother. And the war.

ANGIE Well I'm not telling you so you can die for all I care.

KIT My mother says there's something wrong with you playing with someone my age. She says why haven't you got friends your own age. People your own age know there's something funny about you. She says you're a bad influence. She says she's going to speak to your mother. [ANGIE *twists* KIT's arm till she cries out.]

ANGIE Say you're a liar.

KIT She said it not me.

ANGIE Say you eat shit.

KIT You can't make me. [ANGIE *lets go.*]

ANGIE I don't care anyway. I'm leaving.

KIT Go on then.

ANGIE You'll all wake up one morning and find I've gone.

KIT Good.

ANGIE I'm not telling you when.

KIT Go on then.

ANGIE I'm sorry I hurt you.

KIT I'm tired.

ANGIE Do you like me?

KIT I don't know.

ANGIE You do like me.

KIT I'm going home. [*She gets up.*]

ANGIE No you're not.

KIT I'm tired.

ANGIE She'll see you.

KIT She'll give me a chocolate biscuit.

ANGIE Kitty.

KIT Tell me where you're going.

ANGIE Sit down.

KIT [*sitting down again*] Go on then.

ANGIE Swear?

KIT Swear.

ANGIE I'm going to London. To see my aunt.

KIT And what?

ANGIE That's it.

KIT I see my aunt all the time.

ANGIE I don't see my aunt.

KIT What's so special?

ANGIE It is special. She's special.

KIT Why?

ANGIE She is.

KIT Why?

ANGIE She is.

KIT Why?

ANGIE My mother hates her.

KIT Why?

ANGIE Because she does.

KIT Perhaps she's not very nice.

ANGIE She is nice.

KIT How do you know?

ANGIE Because I know her.

KIT You said you never see her.

ANGIE I saw her last year. You saw her.

KIT Did I?

ANGIE Never mind.

KIT I remember her. That aunt. What's so special?

ANGIE She gets people jobs.

KIT What's so special?

ANGIE I think I'm my aunt's child. I think my mother's really my aunt.

KIT Why?

ANGIE Because she goes to America, now shut up.

KIT I've been to London.

ANGIE Now give us a cuddle and shut up because I'm sick.

KIT You're sitting on my arm.

[They curl up in each other's arms. Silence. JOYCE comes out of the house and comes up to them quietly.]

JOYCE Come on.

KIT Oh hello.

JOYCE Time you went home.

KIT We want to go to the Odeon.

JOYCE What time?

KIT Don't know.

JOYCE What's on?

KIT Don't know.

JOYCE Don't know much do you?

KIT That all right then?

JOYCE Angie's got to clean her room first.

ANGIE No I don't.

JOYCE Yes you do, it's a pigsty.

ANGIE Well I'm not.

JOYCE Then you're not going. I don't care.

ANGIE Well I am going.

JOYCE You've no money, have you?

ANGIE Kit's paying anyway.

JOYCE No she's not.

KIT I'll help you with your room.

JOYCE That's nice.

ANGIE No you won't. You wait here.

KIT Hurry then.

ANGIE I'm not hurrying. You just wait. [ANGIE *goes slowly into the house. Silence.*]

JOYCE I don't know. [*silence*] How's school then?

KIT All right.

JOYCE What are you now? Third year?

KIT Second year.

JOYCE Your mum says you're good at English. [*silence*] Maybe Angie should've stayed on.

KIT She didn't like it.

JOYCE I didn't like it. And look at me. If your face fits at school it's going to fit other places too. It wouldn't make no difference to Angie. She's not going to get a job when jobs are hard to get. I'd be sorry for anyone in charge of her. She'd better get married. I don't know who'd have her, mind. She's one of those girls might never leave home. What do you want to be when you grow up, Kit?

KIT Physicist.

JOYCE What?

KIT Nuclear physicist.

JOYCE Whatever for?

KIT I could, I'm clever.

JOYCE I know you're clever, pet. [*silence*] I'll make a cup of tea.

[*silence*] Looks like it's going to rain. [*silence*] Don't you have friends your own age?

KIT Yes.

JOYCE Well then.

KIT I'm old for my age.

JOYCE And Angie's simple is she? She's not simple.

KIT I love Angie.

JOYCE She's clever in her own way.

KIT You can't stop me.

JOYCE I don't want to.

KIT You can't, so.

JOYCE Don't be cheeky, Kitty. She's always kind to little children.

KIT She's coming so you better leave me alone.

[*ANGIE comes out. She has changed into an old best dress, slightly small for her.*]

JOYCE What you put that on for? Have you done your room? You can't clean you room in that.

ANGIE I looked in the cupboard and it was there.

JOYCE Of course it was there, it's meant to be there. Is that why it was a surprise, finding something in the right place? I should think she's surprised, wouldn't you, Kit, to find something in her room in the right place.

ANGIE I decided to wear it.

JOYCE Not today, why? To clean your room? You're not going to the pictures till you've done your room. You can put your dress on after if you like. [*ANGIE picks up a brick.*] Have you done your room? You're not getting out of it, you know.

KIT Angie, let's go.

JOYCE She's not going till she's done her room.

KIT It's starting to rain.

JOYCE Come on, come on then. Hurry and do your room, Angie, and then you can go to the cinema with Kit. Oh it's wet, come on. We'll look up the time in the paper. Does your mother know, Kit, it's going to be a late night for you, isn't it? Hurry up, Angie. You'll spoil your dress. You make me sick. [JOYCE and KIT run into the house. ANGIE stays where she is. There is the sound of rain. KIT comes out of the house.]

KIT [*shouting*] Angie. Angie, come on, you'll get wet. [*She comes back to ANGIE.*]

ANGIE I put on this dress to kill my mother.

KIT I suppose you thought you'd do it with a brick.

ANGIE You can kill people with a brick. [*She puts the brick down.*]

KIT Well you didn't, so.

Endnotes

- Note 9: Stage direction for *downstage*. "us": *upstage*.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: 1980 American action film, about a Vietnam veteran seeking to cleanse New York of crime.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Television (British slang).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: X-rated, preventing children under the age of 18 from viewing a film.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Odeon Cinemas, a movie theater chain in England. "Ipswich": a town in England.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A woman with many sexual partners (offensive British slang).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Someone annoyingly smart; a smart aleck (British slang).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A type of British sweet like a cookie.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Island country in the Pacific Ocean.[Return to reference 8](#)

Act Two

SCENE 1

"Top Girls" Employment Agency. Monday morning. There are three desks in the main office and a separate small interviewing area. The Lights come up in the main office on WIN and NELL who have just arrived for work.

NELL Coffee coffee coffee coffee / coffee.

WIN The roses were smashing. / Mermaid.

NELL Ohhh.

WIN Iceberg. He taught me all their names. [NELL *has some coffee now.*]

NELL Ah. Now then.

WIN He has one of the finest rose gardens in West Sussex.⁹ He exhibits.

NELL He what?

WIN His wife was visiting her mother. It was like living together.

NELL Crafty, you never said.

WIN He rang on Saturday morning.

NELL Lucky you were free.

WIN That's what I told him.

NELL Did you hell.

WIN Have you ever seen a really beautiful rose garden?

NELL I don't like flowers. / I like swimming pools.

WIN Marilyn. Esther's Baby.¹ They're all called after birds.

NELL Our friend's late. Celebrating all weekend I bet you.

WIN I'd call a rose Elvis. Or John Conteh.²

NELL Is Howard in yet?

WIN If he is he'll be bleeping us with a problem.

NELL Howard can just hang on to himself.

WIN Howard's really cut up.

NELL Howard thinks because he's a fella the job was his as of right.

Our Marlene's got far more balls than Howard and that's that.

WIN Poor little bugger.

NELL He'll live.

WIN He'll move on.

NELL I wouldn't mind a change of air myself.
WIN Serious?
NELL I've never been a staying-put lady. Pastures new.
WIN So who's the pirate?
NELL There's nothing definite.
WIN Inquiries?
NELL There's always inquiries. I'd think I'd got bad breath if there stopped being inquiries. Most of them can't afford me. Or you.
WIN I'm all right for the time being. Unless I go to Australia.
NELL There's not a lot of room upward.
WIN Marlene's filled it up.
NELL Good luck to her. Unless there's some prospects moneywise.
WIN You can but ask.
NELL Can always but ask.
WIN So what have we got? I've got a Mr Holden I saw last week.
NELL Any use?
WIN Pushy. Bit of a cowboy.
NELL Goodlooker?
WIN Good dresser.
NELL High flyer?
WIN That's his general idea certainly but I'm not sure he's got it up there.
NELL Prestel wants six flyers and I've only seen two and a half.
WIN He's making a bomb on the road but he thinks it's time for an office. I sent him to IBM³ but he didn't get it.
NELL Prestel's on the road.
WIN He's not overbright.
NELL Can he handle an office?
WIN Provided his secretary can punctuate he should go far.
NELL Bear Prestel in mind then, I might put my head round the door. I've got that poor little nerd I should never had said I could help. Tender heart me.
WIN Tender like old boots. How old?
NELL Yes well forty-five.
WIN Say no more.

NELL He knows his place, he's not after calling himself a manager, he's just a poor little bod⁴ wants a better commission and a bit of sunshine.

WIN Don't we all.

NELL He's just got to relocate. He's got a bungalow in Dymchurch.⁵

WIN And his wife says.

NELL The lady wife wouldn't care to relocate. She's going through the change.⁶

WIN It's his funeral, don't waste your time.

NELL I don't waste a lot.

WIN Good weekend you?

NELL You could say.

WIN Which one?

NELL One Friday, one Saturday.

WIN Aye—aye.

NELL Sunday night I watched telly.

WIN Which of them do you like best really?

NELL Sunday was best, I like the Ovaltine.⁷

WIN Holden, Barker, Gardner, Duke.

NELL I've a lady here thinks she can sell.

WIN Taking her on?

NELL She's had some jobs.

WIN Services?

NELL No, quite heavy stuff, electric.

WIN Tough bird like us.

NELL We could do with a few more here.

WIN There's nothing going here.

NELL No but I always want the tough ones when I see them. Hang on to them.

WIN I think we're plenty.

NELL Derek asked me to marry him again.

WIN He doesn't know when he's beaten.

NELL I told him I'm not going to play house, not even in Ascot.⁸

WIN Mind you, you could play house.

NELL If I chose to play house I would play house ace.⁹

WIN You could marry him and go on working.

NELL I could go on working and not marry him.

[MARLENE *arrives.*]

MARLENE Morning ladies. [WIN *and* NELL *cheer and whistle.*] Mind my head.

NELL Coffee coffee coffee.

WIN We're tactfully not mentioning you're late.

MARLENE Fucking tube.¹

WIN We've heard that one.

NELL We've used that one.

WIN It's the top executive doesn't come in as early as the poor working girl.

MARLENE Pass the sugar and shut your face, pet.

WIN Well I'm delighted.

NELL Howard's looking sick.

WIN Howard is sick. He's got ulcers and heart. He told me.

NELL He'll have to stop then, won't he?

WIN Stop what?

NELL Smoking, drinking, shouting. Working.

WIN Well, working.

NELL We're just looking through the day.

MARLENE I'm doing some of Pam's ladies. They've been piling up while she's away.

NELL Half a dozen little girls and an arts graduate who can't type.

WIN I spent the whole weekend at his place in Sussex.

NELL She fancies his rose garden.

WIN I had to lie down in the back of the car so the neighbours wouldn't see me go in.

NELL You're kidding.

WIN It was funny.

NELL Fuck that for a joke.

WIN It was funny.

MARLENE Anyway they'd see you in the garden.

WIN The garden has extremely high walls.

NELL I think I'll tell the wife.

WIN Like hell.

NELL She might leave him and you could have the rose garden.

WIN The minute it's not a secret I'm out on my ear.

NELL Don't know why you bother.

WIN Bit of fun.

NELL I think it's time you went to Australia.

WIN I think it's pushy Mr Holden time.

NELL If you've any really pretty bastards, Marlene, I want some for Prestel.

MARLENE I might have one this afternoon. This morning it's all Pam's secretarial.

NELL Not long now and you'll be upstairs watching over us all.

MARLENE Do you fell bad about it?

NELL I don't like coming second.

MARLENE Who does?

WIN We'd rather it was you than Howard. We're glad for you, aren't we, Nell?

NELL Oh yes. Aces.

[LOUISE *enters the interviewing area. The Lights crossfade to*
WIN *and LOUISE in the interviewing area. NELL exits.*]

WIN Now, Louise, hello, I have your details here. You've been very loyal to the one job I see.

LOUISE Yes I have.

WIN Twenty-one years is a long time in one place.

LOUISE I feel it is. I feel it's time to move on.

WIN And you are what age now?

LOUISE I'm in my early forties.

WIN Exactly?

LOUISE Forty-six.

WIN It's not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it's not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something.

LOUISE I hope so.

WIN Now between ourselves is there any trouble, any reason why you're leaving that wouldn't appear on the form?

LOUISE Nothing like that.

WIN Like what?

LOUISE Nothing at all.

WIN No long term understandings come to a sudden end, making for an insupportable atmosphere?

LOUISE I've always completely avoided anything like that at all.

WIN No personality clashes with your immediate superiors or inferiors?

LOUISE I've always taken care to get on very well with everyone.

WIN I only ask because it can affect the reference and it also affects your motivation, I want to be quite clear why you're moving on.

So I take it the job itself no longer satisfies you. Is it the money?

LOUISE It's partly the money. It's not so much the money.

WIN Nine thousand is very respectable. Have you dependants?

LOUISE No, no dependants. My mother died.

WIN So why are you making a change?

LOUISE Other people make changes.

WIN But why are you, now, after spending most of your life in the one place?

LOUISE There you are, I've lived for that company, I've given my life really you could say because I haven't had a great deal of social life, I've worked in the evenings. I haven't had office entanglements for the very reason you just mentioned and if you are committed to your work you don't move in many other circles. I had management status from the age of twenty-seven and you'll appreciate what that means. I've built up a department. And there it is, it works extremely well, and I feel I'm stuck there. I've spent twenty years in middle management. I've seen young men who I trained go on, in my own company or elsewhere, to higher things. Nobody notices me, I don't expect it, I don't attract attention by making mistakes, everybody takes it for granted that my work is perfect. They will notice me when I go, they will be sorry I think to lose me, they will offer me more money of course, I will refuse. They will see when I've gone what I was doing for them.

WIN If they offer you more money you won't stay?

LOUISE No I won't.

WIN Are you the only woman?

LOUISE Apart from the girls of course, yes. There was one, she was my assistant, it was the only time I took on a young woman assistant, I always had my doubts. I don't care greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work. But I did take on this young woman, her qualifications were excellent, and she did well, she got a department of her own, and left the company for a competitor where she's now on the board and good luck to her. She has a different style, she's a new kind of attractive well-dressed—I don't mean I don't dress properly. But there is a kind of woman who is thirty now who grew up in a different climate. They are not so careful. They take themselves for granted. I have had to justify my existence every minute, and I have done so, I have proved—well.

WIN Let's face it, vacancies are ones where you'll be in competition with younger men. And there are companies that will value your experience enough that you'll be in with a chance. There are also fields that are easier for a woman, there is a cosmetic company here where your experience might be relevant. It's eight and a half, I don't know if that appeals.

LOUISE I've proved I can earn money. It's more important to get away. I feel it's now or never. I sometimes / think—

WIN You shouldn't talk too much at an interview.

LOUISE I don't. I don't normally talk about myself. I know very well how to handle myself in an office situation. I only talk to you because it seems to me this is different, it's your job to understand me, surely. You asked the questions.

WIN I think I understand you sufficiently.

LOUISE Well good, that's good.

WIN Do you drink?

LOUISE Certainly not. I'm not a teetotaller,² I think that's very suspect, it's seen as being an alcoholic if you're teetotal. What do you mean? I don't drink. Why?

WIN I drink.

LOUISE I don't.

WIN Good for you.

[The Lights crossfade to the main office with MARLENE sitting at her desk. WIN and LOUISE exit. ANGIE arrives in the main office.]

ANGIE HELLO.

MARLENE Have you an appointment?

ANGIE It's me. I've come.

MARLENE What? It's not Angie?

ANGIE It was hard to find this place. I got lost.

MARLENE How did you get past the receptionist? The girl on the desk, didn't she try to stop you?

ANGIE What desk?

MARLENE Never mind.

ANGIE I just walked in. I was looking for you.

MARLENE Well you found me.

ANGIE Yes.

MARLENE So where's your mum? Are you up in town for the day?

ANGIE Not really.

MARLENE Sit down. Do you feel all right?

ANGIE Yes thank you.

MARLENE So where's Joyce?

ANGIE She's at home.

MARLENE Did you come up on a school trip then?

ANGIE I've left school.

MARLENE Did you come up with a friend?

ANGIE No. There's just me.

MARLENE You came up by yourself, that's fun. What have you been doing? Shopping? Tower of London?

ANGIE No, I just come here. I come to you.

MARLENE That's very nice of you to think of paying your aunty a visit. There's not many nieces make that the first port of call. Would you like a cup of coffee?

ANGIE No thank you.

MARLENE Tea, orange?

ANGIE No thank you.

MARLENE Do you feel all right?

ANGIE Yes thank you.

MARLENE Are you tired from the journey?

ANGIE Yes, I'm tired from the journey.

MARLENE You sit there for a bit then. How's Joyce?

ANGIE She's all right.

MARLENE Same as ever.

ANGIE Oh yes.

MARLENE Unfortunately you've picked a day when I'm rather busy, if there's ever a day when I'm not, or I'd take you out to lunch and we'd go to Madame Tussaud's³ We could go shopping. What time do you have to be back? Have you got a day return?

ANGIE No.

MARLENE So what train are you going back on?

ANGIE I came on the bus.

MARLENE So what bus are you going back on? Are you staying the night?

ANGIE Yes.

MARLENE Who are you staying with? Do you want me to put you up for the night, is that it?

ANGIE Yes please.

MARLENE I haven't got a spare bed.

ANGIE I can sleep on the floor.

MARLENE You can sleep on the sofa.

ANGIE Yes please.

MARLENE I do think Joyce might have phoned me. It's like her.

ANGIE This is where you work is it?

MARLENE It's where I have been working the last two years but I'm going to move into another office.

ANGIE It's lovely.

MARLENE My new office is nicer than this. There's just the one big desk in it for me.

ANGIE Can I see it?

MARLENE Not now, no, there's someone else in it now. But he's leaving at the end of next week and I'm going to do his job.

ANGIE Is that good?

MARLENE Yes, it's very good.

ANGIE Are you going to be in charge?

MARLENE Yes I am.

ANGIE I knew you would be.

MARLENE How did you know?

ANGIE I knew you'd be in charge of everything.

MARLENE Not quite everything.

ANGIE You will be.

MARLENE Well we'll see.

ANGIE Can I see it next week then?

MARLENE Will you still be here next week?

ANGIE Yes.

MARLENE Don't you have to go home?

ANGIE Yes.

MARLENE Don't you have to go home?

ANGIE No.

MARLENE Why not?

ANGIE It's all right.

MARLENE Is it all right?

ANGIE Yes, don't worry about it.

MARLENE Does Joyce know where you are?

ANGIE Yes of course she does.

MARLENE Well does she?

ANGIE Don't worry about it.

MARLENE How long are you planning to stay with me then?

ANGIE You know when you came to see us last year?

MARLENE Yes, that was nice wasn't it.

ANGIE That was the best day of my whole life.

MARLENE So how long are you planning to stay?

ANGIE Don't you want me?

MARLENE Yes yes, I just wondered.

ANGIE I won't stay if you don't want me.

MARLENE No, of course you can stay.

ANGIE I'll sleep on the floor. I won't be any bother.

MARLENE Don't get upset.

ANGIE I'm not, I'm not. Don't worry about it.

[MRS KIDD *comes in.*]

MRS KIDD Excuse me.

MARLENE Yes.

MRS KIDD Excuse me.

MARLENE Can I help you?

MRS KIDD Excuse me bursting in on you like this but I have to talk to you.

MARLENE I am engaged at the moment. / If you could go to reception—

MRS KIDD I'm Rosemary Kidd, Howard's wife, you don't recognize me but we did meet, I remember you of course / but you wouldn't—

MARLENE Yes of course, Mrs Kidd, I'm sorry, we did meet. Howard's about somewhere I expect, have you looked in his office?

MRS KIDD Howard's not about, no. I'm afraid it's you I've come to see if I could have a minute or two.

MARLENE I do have an appointment in five minutes.

MRS KIDD This won't take five minutes. I'm very sorry. It is a matter of some urgency.

MARLENE Well of course. What can I do for you?

MRS KIDD I just wanted a chat, an informal chat. It's not something I can simply—I'm sorry if I'm interrupting your work. I know office work isn't like housework / which is all interruptions.

MARLENE No no, this is my niece. Angie. Mrs Kidd.

MRS KIDD Very pleased to meet you.

ANGIE Very well thank you.

MRS KIDD Howard's not in today.

MARLENE Isn't he?

MRS KIDD He's feeling poorly.

MARLENE I didn't know. I'm sorry to hear that.

MRS KIDD The fact is he's in a state of shock. About what's happened.

MARLENE What has happened?

MRS KIDD You should know if anyone. I'm referring to you been appointed managing director instead of Howard. He hasn't been at

all well all weekend. He hasn't slept for three nights. I haven't slept.

MARLENE I'm sorry to hear that, Mrs Kidd. Has he thought of taking sleeping pills?

MRS KIDD It's very hard when someone has worked all these years.

MARLENE Business life is full of little setbacks. I'm sure Howard knows that. He'll bounce back in a day or two. We all bounce back.

MRS KIDD If you could see him you'd know what I'm talking about. What's it going to do to him working for a woman? I think if it was a man he'd get over it as something normal.

MARLENE I think he's going to have to get over it.

MRS KIDD It's me that bears the brunt. I'm not the one that's been promoted. I put him first every inch of the way. And now what do I get? You women this, you women that. It's not my fault. You're going to have to be very careful how you handle him. He's very hurt.

MARLENE Naturally I'll be tactfull and pleasant to him, you don't start pushing someone around. I'll consult him over any decisions affecting his department. But that's no different, Mrs Kidd, from any of my other colleagues.

MRS KIDD I think it is different, because he's a man.

MARLENE I'm not quite sure why you came to see me.

MRS KIDD I had to do something.

MARLENE Well you've done it, you've seen me. I think that's probably all we've time for. I'm sorry he's been taking it out on you. He really is a shit, Howard.

MRS KIDD But he's got a family to support. He's got three children. It's only fair.

MARLENE Are you suggesting I give up the job to him then?

MRS KIDD It had crossed my mind if you were unavailable after all for some reason, he would be the natural second choice I think, don't you? I'm not asking.

MARLENE Good.

MRS KIDD You mustn't tell him I came. He's very proud.

MARLENE If he doesn't like what's happening here he can go and work somewhere else.

MRS KIDD Is that a threat?

MARLENE I'm sorry but I do have some work to do.

MRS KIDD It's not that easy, a man of Howard's age. You don't care. I thought he was going too far but he's right. You're one of these ballbreakers,⁴ / that's what you

MARLENE I'm sorry but I do have some work to do.

MRS KIDD are. You'll end up miserable and lonely. You're not natural.

MARLENE Could you please piss off?

MRS KIDD I thought if I saw you at least I'd be doing something. [MRS KIDD *goes.*]

MARLENE I've got to go and do some work now. Will you come back later?

ANGIE I think you were wonderful.

MARLENE I've got to go and do some work now.

ANGIE You told her to piss off.

MARLENE Will you come back later?

ANGIE Can't I stay here?

MARLENE Don't you want to go sightseeing?

ANGIE I'd rather stay here.

MARLENE You can stay here I suppose, if it's not boring.

ANGIE It's where I most want to be in the world.

MARLENE I'll see you later then.

[MARLENE *goes.* SHONA *and* NELL *enter the interviewing area.*

ANGIE *sits at WIN's desk. The Lights crossfade to NELL and SHONA in the interviewing area.*]

NELL Is this right? You are Shona?

SHONA Yeh.

NELL It says here you're twenty-nine.

SHONA Yeh.

NELL Too many late nights, me. So you've been where you are for four years, Shona, you're earning six basic and three commission.⁵ So what's the problem?

SHONA No problem.

NELL Why do you want a change?

SHONA Just a change.

NELL Change of product, change of area?

SHONA Both.

NELL But you're happy on the road?

SHONA I like driving.

NELL You're not after management status?

SHONA I would like management status.

NELL You'd be interested in titular management status but not come off the road?

SHONA I want to be on the road, yeh.

NELL So how many calls have you been making a day?

SHONA Six.

NELL And what proportion of those are successful?

SHONA Six.

NELL That's hard to believe.

SHONA Four.

NELL You find it easy to get the initial interest do you?

SHONA Oh yeh, I get plenty of initial interest.

NELL And what about closing?

SHONA I close, don't I?

NELL Because that's what an employer is going to have doubts about with a lady as I needn't tell you, whether she's got the guts to push through to a closing situation. They think we're too nice. They think we listen to the buyer's doubts. They think we consider his needs and his feelings.

SHONA I never consider people's feelings.

NELL I was selling for six years, I can sell anything, I've sold in three continents, and I'm jolly as they come but I'm not very nice.

SHONA I'm not very nice.

NELL What sort of time do you have on the road with the other reps? Get on all right? Handle the chat?

SHONA I get on. Keep myself to myself.

NELL Fairly much of a loner are you?

SHONA Sometimes.

NELL So what field are you interested in?

SHONA Computers.

NELL That's a top field as you know and you'll be up against some very slick fellas there, there's some very pretty boys in computers, it's an American-style field.

SHONA That's why I want to do it.

NELL Video systems appeal? That's a high-flying situation.

SHONA Video systems appeal OK.

NELL Because Prestel have half a dozen vacancies I'm looking to fill at the moment. We're talking in the area of ten to fifteen thousand here and upwards.

SHONA Sounds OK.

NELL I've half a mind to go for it myself. But it's good money here if you've got the top clients. Could you fancy it do you think?

SHONA Work here?

NELL I'm not in a position to offer, there's nothing officially going just now, but we're always on the lookout. There's not that many of us. We could keep in touch.

SHONA I like driving.

NELL So the Prestel appeals?

SHONA Yeh.

NELL What about ties?

SHONA No ties.

NELL So relocation wouldn't be a problem.

SHONA No problem.

NELL So just fill me in a bit more could you about what you've been doing.

SHONA What I've been doing. It's all down there.

NELL The bare facts are down here but I've got to present you to an employer.

SHONA I'm twenty-nine years old.

NELL So it says here.

SHONA We look young. Youngness runs in the family in our family.

NELL So just describe your present job for me.

SHONA My present job at present. I have a car. I have a Porsche. I go up the M1 a lot. Burn up the M1 a lot. Straight up the M1 in the

fast lane to where the clients are, Staffordshire, Yorkshire,⁶ I do a lot in Yorkshire. I'm selling electric things. Like dishwashers, washing machines, stainless steel tubs are a feature and the reliability of the programme. After sales service, we offer a very good after sales service, spare parts, plenty of spare parts. And fridges, I sell a lot of fridges specially in the summer. People want to buy fridges in the summer because of the heat melting the butter and you get fed up standing the milk in a basin of cold water with a cloth over, stands to reason people don't want to do that in this day and age. So I sell a lot of them. Big ones with big freezers. Big freezers. And I stay in hotels at night when I'm away from home. On my expense account. I stay in various hotels. They know me, the ones I go to. I check in, have a bath, have a shower. Then I go down to the bar, have a gin and tonic, have a chat. Then I go into the dining room and have dinner. I usually have fillet steak and mushrooms, I like mushrooms. I like smoked salmon very much. I like having a salad on the side. Green salad. I don't like tomatoes.

NELL Christ what a waste of time.

SHONA Beg your pardon?

NELL Not a word of this is true, is it?

SHONA How do you mean?

NELL You just filled in the form with a pack of lies.

SHONA Not exactly.

NELL How old are you?

SHONA Twenty-nine.

NELL Nineteen?

SHONA Twenty-one.

NELL And what jobs have you done? Have you done any?

SHONA I could though, I bet you.

[The Lights crossfade to the main office with ANGIE sitting as before. WIN comes in to the main office. SHONA and NELL exit.]

WIN Who's sitting in my chair?

ANGIE What? Sorry.

WIN Who's been eating my porridge?

ANGIE What?

WIN It's all right, I saw Marlene. Angie, isn't it? I'm Win. And I'm not going out for lunch because I'm knackered.⁷ I'm going to set me down here and have a yoghurt. Do you like yoghurt?

ANGIE No.

WIN That's good because I've only got one. Are you hungry?

ANGIE No.

WIN There's a cafe on the corner.

ANGIE No thank you. Do you work here?

WIN How did you guess?

ANGIE Because you look as if you might work here and you're sitting at the desk. Have you always worked here?

WIN No I was headhunted. That means I was working for another outfit like this and this lot came and offered me more money. I broke my contract, there was a hell of a stink. There's not many top ladies about. Your aunty's a smashing bird.⁸

ANGIE Yes I know.

MARLENE Fan are you? Fan of your aunty's?

ANGIE Do you think I could work here?

WIN Not at the moment.

ANGIE How do I start?

WIN What can you do?

ANGIE I don't know. Nothing.

WIN Type?

ANGIE Not very well. The letters jump up when I do capitals. I was going to do a CSE⁹ in commerce but I didn't.

WIN What have you got?

ANGIE What?

WIN CSE's, O's.

ANGIE Nothing, none of that. Did you do all that?

WIN Oh yes, all that, and a science degree funnily enough. I started out doing medical research but there's no money in it. I thought I'd go abroad. Did you know they sell Coca Cola in Russia and Pepsi-Cola in China? You don't have to be qualified as much as you might think. Men are awful bullshitters, they like to make out

jobs are harder than they are. Any job I ever did I started doing it better than the rest of the crowd and they didn't like it. So I'd get unpopular and I'd have a drink to cheer myself up. I lived with a fella and supported him for four years, he couldn't get work. After that I went to California. I like the sunshine. Americans know how to live. This country's too slow. Then I went to Mexico, still in sales, but it's no country for a single lady. I came home, went bonkers for a bit, thought I was five different people, got over that all right, the psychiatrist said I was perfectly sane and highly intelligent. Got married in a moment of weakness and he's inside¹ now, he's been inside four years, and I've not been to see him too much this last year. I like this better than sales, I'm not really that aggressive. I started thinking sales was a good job if you want to meet people, but you're meeting people that don't want to meet you. It's no good if you like being liked. Here your clients want to meet you because you're the one doing them some good. They hope. [ANGIE *has fallen asleep*. NELL *comes in*.]

NELL You're talking to yourself, sunshine.

WIN So what's new?

NELL Who is this?

WIN Marlene's little niece.

NELL What's she got, brother, sister? She never talks about her family.

WIN I was telling her my life story.

NELL Violins?

WIN No, success story.

NELL You've heard Howard's had a heart attack?

WIN No, when?

NELL I heard just now. He hadn't come in, he was at home, he's gone to hospital. He's not dead. His wife was here, she rushed off in a cab.

WIN Too much butter, too much smoke. We must send him some flowers. [MARLENE *comes in*.] You've heard about Howard?

MARLENE Poor sod.

NELL Lucky he didn't get the job if that's what his health's like.

MARLENE Is she asleep?

WIN She wants to work here.

MARLENE Packer in Tesco² more like.

WIN She's a nice kid. Isn't she?

MARLENE She's a bit thick. She's a bit funny.

WIN She thinks you're wonderful.

MARLENE She's not going to make it.

Endnotes

- Note 9: County in southeast England. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: "Mermaid," "Iceberg," "Marilyn," and "Esther's Baby" are all names of rose varieties. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British boxing champion (b. 1951). "Elvis": Elvis Presley (1935–1977), American singer. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: International Business Machines Corporation, multinational technology company established 1911. "Bomb on the road": earning a great deal of money. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A person (British slang). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Village in England. [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Likely referring to menopause. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Flavored powder for milk, made from malt extract. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Town in England, known for the Royal Ascot horse race, a major social event attended by the British monarchy. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: The best (British slang). [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The subway system in London. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Someone who practices total abstinence from alcohol. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Wax museum featuring life-size replicas of celebrities and historical figures. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Someone, especially a woman, who is demanding of men (slang). [Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Likely £600 a month salary, plus £300 a month on commission.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: County in northern England. "Porsche": brand of luxury sports car. "M1": a major highway in England. "Staffordshire": county in western England.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Tired (British slang).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A great girl (British slang).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Certificate of Secondary Education. It was added to broaden the subjects available for qualifications, and was more vocational.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In prison.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British supermarket.[Return to reference 2](#)

SCENE 2

JOYCE's kitchen. Sunday evening, a year earlier. The Lights come up on JOYCE, ANGIE and MARLENE, MARLENE is taking presents out of bright carrier bag. ANGIE has already opened a box of chocolates.

MARLENE Just a few little things. / I've

JOYCE There's no need.

MARLENE no memory for birthdays have I, and Christmas seems to slip by. So I think I owe Angie a few presents.

JOYCE What do you say?

ANGIE Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Aunty Marlene [She opens a present. It is the dress from Act One, new.] Oh look, Mum, isn't it lovely?

MARLENE I don't know if it's the right size. She's grown up since I saw her. / I knew she was always

ANGIE Isn't it lovely?

MARLENE tall for her age.

JOYCE She's a big lump.

MARLENE Hold it up, Angie, let's see.

ANGIE I'll put it on, shall I?

MARLENE Yes, try it on.

JOYCE Go on to your room then, we don't want / a strip show thank you.

ANGIE Of course I'm going to my room, what do you think. Look, Mum, here's something for you. Open it, go on. What is it? Can I open it for you?

JOYCE Yes, you open it, pet.

ANGIE Don't you want to open it yourself? / Go on.

JOYCE I don't mind, you can do it.

ANGIE It's something hard. It's—what is it? A bottle. Drink is it? No, it's what? Perfume, look. What a lot. Open it, look, let's smell it. Oh it's strong. It's lovely. Put it on me. How do you do it? Put it on me.

JOYCE You're too young.

ANGIE I can play wearing it like dressing up.

JOYCE And you're too old for that. Here, give it here, I'll do it, you'll tip the whole bottle over yourself / and we'll have you smelling all summer.

ANGIE Put it on you. Do I smell? Put it on Auntie too. Put it on Auntie too. Let's all smell.

MARLENE I didn't know what you'd like.

JOYCE There's no danger I'd have it already, / that's one thing.

ANGIE Now we all smell the same.

MARLENE It's a bit nonsense.

JOYCE It's very kind of you Marlene, you shouldn't.

ANGIE Now I'll put on the dress and then we'll see. [ANGIE goes.]

JOYCE You've caught me on the hop³ with the place in the mess. / If you'd let me

MARLENE That doesn't matter.

JOYCE know you was coming I'd have got something in to eat. We had our dinner dinnertime. We're just going to have a cup of tea. You could have an egg.

MARLENE No, I'm not hungry. Tea's fine.

JOYCE I don't expect you take sugar.

MARLENE Why not?

JOYCE You take care of yourself.

MARLENE How do you mean you didn't know I was coming?

JOYCE You could have written. I know we're not on the phone but we're not completely in the dark ages, / we do have a postman.

MARLENE But you asked me to come.

JOYCE How did I ask you to come?

MARLENE Angie said when she phoned up.

JOYCE Angie phoned up, did she.

MARLENE Was it just Angie's idea?

JOYCE What did she say?

MARLENE She said you wanted me to come and see you. / It was a couple of

JOYCE Ha.

MARLENE weeks ago. How was I to know that's a ridiculous idea? My diary's always full a couple of weeks ahead so we fixed it for this

weekend. I was meant to get here earlier but I was held up. She gave me messages from you.

JOYCE Didn't you wonder why I didn't phone you myself?

MARLENE She said you didn't like using the phone. You're shy on the phone and can't use it. I don't know what you're like, do I?

JOYCE Are there people who can't use the phone?

MARLENE I expect so.

JOYCE I haven't met any.

MARLENE Why should I think she was lying?

JOYCE Because she's like what she's like.

MARLENE How do I know / what she's like?

JOYCE It's not my fault you don't know what she's like. You never come and see her.

MARLENE Well I have now / and you don't seem over the moon.*

JOYCE Good. *Well I'd have got a cake if she'd told me. (*pause*)

MARLENE I did wonder why you wanted to see me.

JOYCE I didn't want to see you.

MARLENE Yes, I know. Shall I go?

JOYCE I don't mind seeing you.

MARLENE Great, I feel really welcome.

JOYCE You can come and see Angie any time you like, I'm not stopping you. / You

MARLENE Ta ever so.⁴

JOYCE know where we are. You're the one went away, not me. I'm right here where I was. And will be a few years yet I shouldn't wonder.

MARLENE All right. All right. [JOYCE *gives* MARLENE *a cup of tea.*]

JOYCE Tea.

MARLENE Sugar? [JOYCE *passes* MARLENE *the sugar.*] It's very quiet down here.

JOYCE I expect you'd notice it.

MARLENE The air smells different too.

JOYCE That's the scent.

MARLENE No, I mean walking down the lane.

JOYCE What sort of air you get in London then?

[ANGIE comes in, wearing the dress. It fits.]

MARLENE Oh, very pretty. / You do look pretty, Angie.

JOYCE That fits all right.

MARLENE Do you like the colour?

ANGIE Beautiful. Beautiful.

JOYCE You better take it off, / you'll get it dirty.

ANGIE I want to wear it. I want to wear it.

MARLENE It is for wearing after all. You can't just hang it up and look at it.

ANGIE I love it.

JOYCE Well if you must you must.

ANGIE If someone asks me what's my favourite colour I'll tell them it's this. Thank you very much, Aunty Marlene.

MARLENE You didn't tell your mum you asked me down.

ANGIE I wanted it to be a surprise.

JOYCE I'll give you a surprise / one of these days.

ANGIE I thought you'd like to see her. She hasn't been here since I was nine. People do see their aunts.

MARLENE Is it that long? Doesn't time fly.

ANGIE I wanted to.

JOYCE I'm not cross.

ANGIE Are you glad?

JOYCE I smell nicer anyhow, don't I?

[KIT comes in without saying anything, as if she lived there.]

MARLENE I think it was a good idea, Angie, about time. We are sisters after all. It's a pity to let that go.

JOYCE This is Kitty, / who lives up the road. This is Angie's Aunty Marlene.

KIT What's that?

ANGIE It's a present. Do you like it?

KIT It's all right. / Are you coming out?*

MARLENE Hello, Kitty.

ANGIE *No.

KIT What's that smell?

ANGIE It's a present.

KIT It's horrible. Come on.*

MARLENE Have a chocolate.

ANGIE *No, I'm busy.

KIT Coming out later?

ANGIE No.

KIT [*to* MARLENE] Hello. [KIT *goes without a chocolate.*]

JOYCE She's a little girl Angie sometimes plays with because she's the only child lives really close. She's like a little sister to her really. Angie's good with little children.

MARLENE Do you want to work with children, Angie? / Be a teacher or a nursery nurse?

JOYCE I don't think she's ever thought of it.

MARLENE What do you want to do?

JOYCE She hasn't an idea in her head what she wants to do. / Lucky to get anything.

MARLENE Angie?

JOYCE She's not clever like you. [*pause*]

MARLENE I'm not clever, just pushy.

JOYCE True enough. [MARLENE *takes a bottle of whisky out of the bag.*] I don't drink spirits.

ANGIE You do at Christmas.

JOYCE It's not Christmas, is it?

ANGIE It's better than Christmas.

MARLENE Glasses?

JOYCE Just a small one then.

MARLENE Do you want some, Angie?

ANGIE I can't, can I?

JOYCE Taste it if you want. You won't like it. [ANGIE *tastes it.*]

ANGIE Mmm.

MARLENE We got drunk together the night your grandfather died.

JOYCE We did not get drunk.

MARLENE I got drunk. You were just overcome with grief.

JOYCE I still keep up the grave with flowers.

MARLENE Do you really?

JOYCE Why wouldn't I?

MARLENE Have you seen Mother?

JOYCE Of course I've seen Mother.

MARLENE I mean lately.

JOYCE Of course I've seen her lately, I go every Thursday.

MARLENE [*to* ANGIE] Do you remember your grandfather?

ANGIE He got me out of the bath one night in a towel.

MARLENE Did he? I don't think he ever gave me a bath. Did he give you a bath, Joyce? He probably got soft in his old age. Did you like him?

ANGIE Yes of course.

MARLENE Why?

ANGIE What?

MARLENE So what's the hews? How's Mrs Paisley? Still going crazily / And Dorothy. What happened to Dorothy?*

ANGIE Who's Mrs Paisley?

JOYCE *She went to Canada.

MARLENE Did she? What to do?

JOYCE I don't know. She just went to Canada.

MARLENE Well / good for her.

ANGIE Mr Connolly killed his wife.

MARLENE What, Connolly at Whitegates?

ANGIE They found her body in the garden. / Under the cabbages.

MARLENE He was always so proper.

JOYCE Stuck up git,⁵ Connolly. Best lawyer money could buy but he couldn't get out of it. She was carrying on with Matthew.

MARLENE How old's Matthew then?

JOYCE Twenty-one. / He's got a motorbike.

MARLENE I think he's about six.

ANGIE How can he be six? He's six years older than me. / If he was six I'd be nothing, I'd be just born this minute.

JOYCE You aunty knows that, she's just being silly. She means it's so long since she's been here she's forgotten about Matthew.

ANGIE You were here for my brithday when I was nine. I had a pink cake. Kit was only five then, she was four, she hadn't started

school yet. She could read already when she went to school. You remember my birthday / You remember me?

MARLENE Yes, I remember the cake.

ANGIE You remember me?

MARLENE Yes, I remember you.

ANGIE And Mum and Dad was there, and Kit was.

MARLENE Yes, how is your dad? Where is he tonight? Up the pub?

JOYCE No, he's not here.

MARLENE I can see he's not here.

JOYCE He moved out.

MARLENE What? When did he? / Just recently?*

ANGIE Didn't you know that? You don't know much.

JOYCE *No, it must be three years ago. Don't be rude, Angie.

ANGIE I'm not, am I, Aunty? What else don't you know?

JOYCE You was in America or somewhere. You sent a postcard.

ANGIE I've got that in my room. It's the Grand Canyon.⁶ Do you want to see it? Shall I get it? I can get it for you.

MARLENE Yes, all right. [ANGIE *goes.*]

JOYCE You could be married with twins for all I know. You must have affairs and break up and I don't need to know about any of that so I don't see what the fuss is about.

MARLENE What fuss? [ANGIE *comes back with the postcard.*]

ANGIE "Driving across the states for a new job in L.A.⁷ It's a long way but the car goes very fast. It's very hot. Wish you were here. Love from Aunty Marlene."

JOYCE Did you make a lot of money?

MARLENE I spent a lot.

ANGIE I want to go to America. Will you take me?

JOYCE She's not going to America, she's been to America, stupid.

ANGIE She might go again, stupid. It's not something you do once. People who go keep going all the time, back and forth on jets. They go on Concorde and Laker⁸ and get jet lag. Will you take me?

MARLENE I'm not planning a trip.

ANGIE Will you let me know?

JOYCE Angie, / you're getting silly.
ANGIE I want to be American.
JOYCE It's time you were in bed.
ANGIE No it's not. / I don't have to go to bed at all tonight.
JOYCE School in the morning.
ANGIE I'll wake up.
JOYCE Come on now, you know how you get.
ANGIE How do I get? / I don't get anyhow.*
JOYCE Angie. *Are you staying the night?
MARLENE Yes, if that's all right. / I'll see you in the morning.
ANGIE You can have my bed. I'll sleep on the sofa.
JOYCE You will not, you'll sleep in your bed. / Think
ANGIE Mum.
JOYCE I can't see through that? I can just see you going to sleep /
with us talking.
ANGIE I would, I would go to sleep, I'd love that.
JOYCE I'm going to get cross, Angie.
ANGIE I want to show her something.
JOYCE Then bed.
ANGIE It's a secret.
JOYCE Then I expect it's in your room so off you go. Give us a shout
when you're ready for bed and your aunty'll be up and see you.
ANGIE Will you?
MARLENE Yes of course. [ANGIE *goes. Silence.*] It's cold tonight.
JOYCE Will you be all right on the sofa? You can / have my bed.
MARLENE The sofa's fine.
JOYCE Yes the forecast said rain tonight but it's held off.
MARLENE I was going to walk down to the estuary but I've left it a
bit late. Is it just the same?
JOYCE They cut down the hedges a few years back. Is that since
you were here?
MARLENE But it's not changed down the end, all the mud? And the
reeds? We used to pick them up when they were bigger than us.
Are there still lapwings?⁹

JOYCE You get strangers walking there on a Sunday. I expect they're looking at the mud and the lapwings, yes.

MARLENE You could have left.

JOYCE Who says I wanted to leave?

MARLENE Stop getting at me then, you're really boring.

JOYCE How could I have left?

MARLENE Did you want to?

JOYCE I said how, / how could I?

MARLENE If you'd wanted to you'd have done it.

JOYCE Christ.

MARLENE Are we getting drunk?

JOYCE Do you want something to eat?

MARLENE No, I'm getting drunk.

JOYCE Funny time to visit, Sunday evening.

MARLENE I came this morning. I spent the day—

ANGIE [*off*] Aunty! Aunty Marlene!

MARLENE I'd better go.

JOYCE Go on then.

MARLENE All right.

ANGIE [*off*] Aunty! Can you hear me? I'm ready.

[MARLENE *goes*. JOYCE *goes on sitting, clears up, sits again*.

MARLENE *comes back*.]

JOYCE So what's the secret?

MARLENE It's a secret.

JOYCE I know what it is anyway.

MARLENE I bet you don't. You always said that.

JOYCE It's her exercise book.

MARLENE Yes, but you don't know what's in it.

JOYCE It's some game, some secret society she has with Kit.

MARLENE You don't know the password. You don't know the code.

JOYCE You're really in it, aren't you. Can you do the handshake?

MARLENE She didn't mention a handshake.

JOYCE I thought they'd have a special handshake. She spends hours writing that but she's useless at school. She copies things out of

books about black magic, and politicians out of the paper. It's a bit childish.

MARLENE I think it's a plot to take over the world.

JOYCE She's been in the remedial class the last two years.

MARLENE I came up this morning and spent the day in Ipswich. I went to see mother.

JOYCE Did she recognize you?

MARLENE Are you trying to be funny?

JOYCE No, she does wander.

MARLENE She wasn't wandering at all, she was very lucid thank you.

JOYCE You were very lucky then.

MARLENE Fucking awful life she's had.

JOYCE Don't tell me.

MARLENE Fucking waste.

JOYCE Don't talk to me.

MARLENE Why shouldn't I talk? Why shouldn't I talk to you? / Isn't she my mother too?

JOYCE Look, you've left, you've gone away, / we can do without you.

MARLENE I left home, so what, I left home. People do leave home / it is normal.

JOYCE We understand that, we can do without you.

MARLENE We weren't happy. Were you happy?

JOYCE Don't come back.

MARLENE So it's just your mother is it, your child, you never wanted me round, / you were jealous

JOYCE Here we go.

MARLENE of me because I was the little one and I was clever.

JOYCE I'm not clever enough for all this psychology / if that's what it is.

MARLENE Why can't I visit my own family / without

JOYCE Aah.

MARLENE all this?

JOYCE Just don't go on about Mum's life when you haven't been to see her for how many years. / I go

MARLENE It's up to me.

JOYCE and see her every week.

MARLENE Then don't go and see her every week.

JOYCE Somebody has to.

MARLENE No they don't. / Why do they?

JOYCE How would I feel if I didn't go?

MARLENE A lot better.

JOYCE I hope you feel better.

MARLENE It's up to me.

JOYCE You couldn't get out of here fast enough. [*pause*]

MARLENE Of course I couldn't get out of here fast enough. What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed? / Don't you fucking this

JOYCE Christ.

MARLENE fucking that fucking bitch fucking tell me what to fucking do fucking.

JOYCE I don't know how you could leave your own child.

MARLENE You were quick enough to take her.

JOYCE What does that mean?

MARLENE You were quick enough to take her.

JOYCE Or what? Have her put in a home? Have some stranger / I take her would you rather?

MARLENE You couldn't have one so you took mine.

JOYCE I didn't know that then.

MARLENE Like hell, / married three years.

JOYCE I didn't know that. Plenty of people / take that long.

MARLENE Well it turned out lucky for you, didn't it?

JOYCE Turned out all right for you by the look of you. You'd be getting a few less thousand a year.

MARLENE Not necessarily.

JOYCE You'd be stuck here / like you said.

MARLENE I could have taken her with me.

JOYCE You didn't want to take her with you. It's no good coming back now, Marlene, / and saying—

MARLENE I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because

she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money.

JOYCE So what's that got to do with you at the age of seventeen?

MARLENE Just because you were married and had somewhere to live

—

JOYCE You could have lived at home. / Or live

MARLENE Don't be stupid.

JOYCE with me and Frank. / You

MARLENE You never suggested.

JOYCE said you weren't keeping it. You shouldn't have had it / if you wasn't

MARLENE Here we go.

JOYCE going to keep it. You was the most stupid, / for someone so clever you was the most stupid, get yourself pregnant, not go to the doctor, not tell.

MARLENE You wanted it, you said you were glad, I remember the day, you said I'm glad you never got rid of it, I'll look after it, you said that down by the river. So what are you saying, sunshine, you don't want her?

JOYCE Course I'm not saying that.

MARLENE Because I'll take her, / wake her up and pack now.

JOYCE You wouldn't know how to begin to look after her.

MARLENE Don't you want her?

JOYCE Course I do, she's my child.

MARLENE Then what are you going on about / why did I have her?

JOYCE You said I got her off you / when you didn't—

MARLENE I said you were lucky / the way it—

JOYCE Have a child now if you want one. You're not old.

MARLENE I might do.

JOYCE Good. [*pause*]

MARLENE I've been on the pill¹ so long / I'm probably sterile.

JOYCE Listen when Angie was six months I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby / because she cried so

MARLENE You never told me.

JOYCE much—yes I did tell you—/ and the doctor

MARLENE Well I forgot.

JOYCE said if I'd sat down all day with my feet up I'd've kept it / and that's the only chance I ever had because after that—

MARLENE I've had two abortions, are you interested? Shall I tell you about them? Well I won't, it's boring, it wasn't a problem. I don't like messy talk about blood / and what a bad time we all had. I

JOYCE If I hadn't had your baby. The doctor said.

MARLENE don't want a baby. I don't want to talk about gynaecology.

JOYCE Then stop trying to get Angie off of me.

MARLENE I come down here after six years. All night you've been saying I don't come often enough. If I don't come for another six years she'll be twenty-one, will that be OK?

JOYCE That'll be fine, yes, six years would suit me fine. [*pause*]

MARLENE I was afraid of this. I only came because I thought you wanted . . . I just want . . . [*She cries.*]

JOYCE Don't grizzle,² Marlene, for God's sake.

Marly? Come on, pet. Love you really.

Fucking stop it, will you? [*She goes to MARLENE.*]

MARLENE No, let me cry. I like it. [*They laugh, MARLENE begins to stop crying.*] I knew I'd cry if I wasn't careful.

JOYCE Everyone's always crying in this house. Nobody takes any notice.

MARLENE You've been wonderful looking after Angie.

JOYCE Don't get carried away.

MARLENE I can't write letters but I do think of you.

JOYCE You're getting drunk. I'm going to make some tea.

MARLENE Love you. [*JOYCE goes to make tea.*]

JOYCE I can see why you'd want to leave. It's a dump here.

MARLENE So what's this about you and Frank?

JOYCE He was always carrying on, wasn't he. And if I wanted to go out in the evening he'd go mad, even if it was nothing, a class, I was going to go to an evening class. So he had this girlfriend, only twenty-two poor cow, and I said go on, off you go, hoppit.³ I don't think he even likes her.

MARLENE So what about money?

JOYCE I've always said I don't want your money.

MARLENE No, does he send you money?

JOYCE I've got four different cleaning jobs. Adds up. There's not a lot round here.

MARLENE Does Angie miss him?

JOYCE She doesn't say.

MARLENE Does she see him?

JOYCE He was never that fond of her to be honest.

MARLENE He tried to kiss me once. When you were engaged.

JOYCE Did you fancy him?

MARLENE No, he looked like a fish.

JOYCE He was lovely then.

MARLENE Ugh.

JOYCE Well I fancied him. For about three years.

MARLENE Have you got someone else?

JOYCE There's not a lot round here. Mind you, the minute you're on your own, you'd be amazed how your friends' husbands drop by. I'd sooner do without.

MARLENE I don't see why you couldn't take my money.

JOYCE I do, so don't bother about it.

MARLENE Only got to ask.

JOYCE So what about you? Good job?

MARLENE Good for a laugh. / Got back

JOYCE Good for more than a laugh I should think.

MARLENE from the US of A a bit wiped out and slotted into this speedy employment agency and still there.

JOYCE You can always find yourself work then?

MARLENE That's right.

JOYCE And men?

MARLENE Oh there's always men.

JOYCE No-one special?

MARLENE There's fellas who like to be seen with a high-flying lady. Shows they've got something really good in their pants. But they can't take the day to day. They're waiting for me to turn into the little woman. Or maybe I'm just horrible of course.

JOYCE Who needs them.

MARLENE Who needs them. Well I do. But I need adventures more.
So on on into the sunset. I think the eighties are going to be
stupendous.

JOYCE Who for?

MARLENE For me. / I think I'm going up up up.

JOYCE Oh for you. Yes, I'm sure they will.

MARLENE And for the country, come to that. Get the economy back
on its feet and whoosh. She's a tough lady, Maggie.⁴ I'd give her a
job. / She just needs to hang

JOYCE You voted for them, did you?

MARLENE in there. This country needs to stop whining. /
Monetarism⁵ is not

JOYCE Drink your tea and shut up, pet.

MARLENE stupid. It takes time, determination. No more slop. / And

JOYCE Well I think they're filthy bastards.

MARLENE who's got to drive it on? First woman prime minister.

Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote.

JOYCE What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have
liked Hitler⁶ if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done,
Hitlerina. / Great adventures.

MARLENE Bosses still walking on the worker's faces? Still dadda's little
parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the
individual. Look at me.

JOYCE I am looking at you.

MARLENE Come on, Joyce, we're not going to quarrel over politics.

JOYCE We are though.

MARLENE Forget I mentioned it. Not a word about the slimy unions
will cross my lips. [*pause*]

JOYCE You say Mother had a wasted life.

MARLENE Yes I do. Married to that bastard.

JOYCE What sort of life did he have? /

MARLENE Violent life?

JOYCE Working in the fields like an animal. / Why

MARLENE Come off it.

JOYCE wouldn't he want a drink? You want a drink. He couldn't afford whisky.

MARLENE I don't want to talk about him.

JOYCE You started, I was talking about her. She had a rotten life because she had nothing. She went hungry.

MARLENE She was hungry because he drank the money. / He used to hit her.

JOYCE It's not all down to him / Their

MARLENE She didn't hit him.

JOYCE lives were rubbish. They were treated like rubbish. He's dead and she'll die soon and what sort of life / did they have?

MARLENE I saw him one night. I came down.

JOYCE Do you think I didn't? / They

MARLENE I still have dreams.

JOYCE didn't get to America and drive across it in a fast car. / Bad nights, they had bad days.

MARLENE America, America, you're jealous. / I had to get out, I knew when I

JOYCE Jealous?

MARLENE was thirteen, out of their house, out of them, never let that happen to me, / never let him, make my own way, out.

JOYCE Jealous of what you've done, you'd be ashamed of me if I came to your office, your smart friends, wouldn't you, I'm ashamed of you, think of nothing but yourself, you've got on, nothing's changed for most people, / has it?

MARLENE I hate the working class / which is what

JOYCE Yes you do.

MARLENE you're going to go on about now, it doesn't exist any more, it means lazy and stupid. / I don't

JOYCE Come on, now we're getting it.

MARLENE like the way they talk. I don't like beer guts and football⁷ vomit and saucy tits / and brothers and sisters—

JOYCE I spit when I see a Rolls Royce, scratch it with my ring / Mercedes⁸ it was.

MARLENE Oh very mature—

JOYCE I hate the cows I work for / and their dirty dishes with
blanquette of fucking veau.⁹

MARLENE and I will not be pulled down to their level by a flying
picket and I won't be sent to Siberia¹ / or a loony bin just because
I'm original. And I support

JOYCE No, you'll be on a yacht, you'll be head of Coca Cola and you
wait, the eighties is going to be stupendous all right because we'll
get you lot off our backs—

MARLENE Reagan² even if he is a lousy movie star because the reds
are swarming up his map and I want to be free in a free world—

JOYCE What? / What?

MARLENE I know what I mean / by that—not shut up here.

JOYCE So don't be round here when it happens because if
someone's kicking you I'll just laugh. [*silence*]

MARLENE I don't mean anything personal. I don't believe in class.
Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes.

JOYCE And if they haven't?

MARLENE If they're stupid or lazy or frightened, I'm not going to help
them get a job, why should I?

JOYCE What about Angie?

MARLENE What about Angie?

JOYCE She's stupid, lazy and frightened, so what about her?

MARLENE You run her down too much. She'll be all right.

JOYCE I don't expect so, no. I expect her children will say what a
wasted life she had. If she has children. Because nothing's
changed and it won't with them in.

MARLENE Them, them. / Us and them?

JOYCE And you're one of them.

MARLENE And you're us, wonderful us, and Angie's us / and Mum
and Dad's us.

JOYCE Yes, that's right, and you're them.

MARLENE Come on, Joyce, what a night. You've got what it takes.

JOYCE I know I have.

MARLENE I didn't really mean all that.

JOYCE I did.

MARLENE But we're friends anyway.

JOYCE I don't think so, no.

MARLENE Well it's lovely to be out in the country. I really must make the effort to come more often. I want to go to sleep. I want to go to sleep. [JOYCE *gets blankets for the sofa.*]

JOYCE Goodnight then. I hope you'll be warm enough.

MARLENE Goodnight. Joyce—

JOYCE No, pet. Sorry. [JOYCE *goes.* MARLENE *sits wrapped in a blanket and has another drink.* ANGIE *comes in.*]

ANGIE Mum?

MARLENE Angie? What's the matter?

ANGIE Mum?

MARLENE No, she's gone to bed. It's Aunty Marlene.

ANGIE Frightening.

MARLENE Did you have a bad dream? What happened in it? Well you're awake now, aren't you, pet?

ANGIE Frightening.

End of Play

1979

Endnotes

- Note 3: Unprepared (British slang). [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Thanks (British slang). [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A stuck-up person (British slang). [Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Natural wonder in Arizona created by the Colorado River. [Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Los Angeles, city in California. [Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Laker Airways, one of the first low-cost airlines; it went bankrupt and ceased operating in 1981. "Concorde": a high-speed passenger plane. [Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A type of ground-nesting bird. [Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Birth control. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Someone crying or whining, typically a young child (British slang).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Hop to it.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013), the first female British prime minister (1979–90).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: An economic school of thought, asserting that monetary supply is the dominant influence on the economy. If the rate of increase of money is controlled, particularly by governments, then growth stabilizes. This was central to Thatcher’s economic policies.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: German dictator and leader of the Nazi Party (1933–45).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: European football, what Americans call soccer.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Luxury car.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: French veal stew.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Region in Russia where the former Soviet Union established prison labor camps.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: President of the United States 1981–89, at the same time as Thatcher, with similar economic policies. He was formerly an actor who starred in many films.[Return to reference 2](#)

LES MURRAY

1938–2019

Leslie Allan Murray was born at Nabiac, on the north coast of New South Wales, Australia, and grew up on a dairy farm at nearby Bunyah. He was educated at Taree High School and the University of Sydney, where he studied modern languages. After military service with the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, he worked as a translator in the Australian National University, Canberra, and as an officer in the prime minister's department. He became a full-time writer in 1971.

Remaining true to his roots in the Australian "outback" (despite the global shuttling expected of a major poet in the twenty-first century), Murray emerged as a powerful celebrant of the natural world and agricultural work. His substantial *Collected Poems* (1998), dedicated "to the glory of God," bears witness to a staunch and highly individual Roman Catholicism. His celebration of nature includes human nature and reveals a sensibility generously attuned to the hopes and fears, hurts and happinesses of ordinary lives.

Murray seemed intent on proving that the provincial farmer living at the margins of the former British Empire can write poetry as learned, authoritative, and technically virtuosic as any from the metropolitan center. The language of his poetry startles and amuses, reveling in the fecundity and elasticity of English. In poems of metaphorical lushness and sonic opulence, he plays on the eddying reflections of homonyms and rhymes, alliterations and consonances, to suggest a profound interconnectedness among things. As Derek

Walcott said of Murray's work: "There is no poetry in the English language so rooted in its sacredness, so broad-leafed in its pleasures, and yet so intimate and conversational."

Morse¹

Tuckett. Bill Tuckett. Telegraph operator, Hall's Creek,
which is way out back of the Outback, but he stuck
it,
quite likely liked it, despite heat, glare, dust and the
lack
of diversion or doctors. Come disaster you trusted to
luck,
5 ingenuity and pluck. This was back when nice people
said pluck,
the sleevelink and green eyeshade epoch.²
Faced, though,
like Bill Tuckett
with a man needing surgery right on the spot, a lot
would have done their dashes. It looked hopeless
(dot dot dot)
Lift him up on the table, said Tuckett, running the
key hot
10 till Head Office turned up a doctor who coolly
instructed
up a thousand miles of wire, as Tuckett advanced slit
by slit
with a safety razor blade, pioneering on into the wet,
copper-wiring the rivers off, in the first operation
conducted
along dotted lines, with rum drinkers gripping the
patient:
d-d-dash it, take care, Tuck!
15 And the vital spark stayed
unshorted.

Yallah!³ breathed the camelmen. Tuckett, you did it,
you did it!
cried the spattered la-de-dah jodhpur⁴-wearing
Inspector of Stock.
We imagine, some weeks later, a properly laconic
convalescent averring Without you, I'd have kicked
the bucket . . .

20 From Chungking to Burrenjuck,⁵ morse keys have
mostly gone silent
and only old men meet now to chit-chat in their
electric
bygone dialect. The last letter many will forget
is dit-dit-dit-dah,⁶ V for Victory. The coders' hero had
speed,
resource and a touch. So ditditdit daah for Bill
Tuckett.

1983

Endnotes

- Note 1: Morse code was used to transmit messages by sequences of dots and dashes (or *dits* and *dahs*) to represent letters and numbers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the nineteenth century. "Sleevelink": cuff link.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: God be praised! (Arabic).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Long breeches for riding, close-fitting from knee to ankle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, from southwest China to southeast Australia.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, also representing V for victory, the signal by which Morse code

operators prefaced messages in World War II.[Return to reference 6](#)

Corniche¹

I work all day and hardly drink at all.²
I can reach down and feel if I'm depressed.
I adore the Creator because I made myself
and a few times a week a wire jags in my chest.

5 The first time, I'd been coming apart all year,
weeping, incoherent; cigars had given me up:
any road round a cliff edge I'd whimper along in low
gear
then: cardiac horror. Masking my pulse's calm lub-
dub.

10 It was the victim-sickness. Adrenaline howling in my
head,
the black dog³ was my brain. Come to drown me in
my breath
was energy's black hole, depression, compere⁴ of the
predawn show
when, returned from a pee, you stew and welter in
your death.

15 The rogue space rock is on course to snuff your
world,
sure. But go acute, and its oncoming fills your day.
The brave die but once? I could go a hundred times
a week,
clinging to my pulse with the world's edge inches
away.

Laugh, who never shrank around wizened genitals
there

or killed themselves to stop dying. The blow that
never falls
batters you stupid. Only gradually do
you notice a slight scorn in you for what appals.

A self inside self, cool as conscience, one to be
erased
in your final night, or faxed, still knows beneath
all the mute grand opera and uncaused effect—
that death which can be imagined is not true death.

1996

Endnotes

- Note 1: Coastal road.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: See the opening of "Aubade," by the English poet Philip Larkin (1922–1985): "I work all day, and get half drunk at night."[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, depression.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Master of ceremonies.[Return to reference 4](#)

The Kitchen Grammars

5 The verb in a Sanscrit or Farsi¹
or Latin or Japanese sentence
most frequently comes last,
as if the ingredients and spices
only after collection, measure and
even preservation might get cooked.
To all these cuisines renown attaches.

10 It's the opening of a Celtic² sentence
is a verb. And it was more fire and pot
for us very often than ingredients.
Had we not fed our severed heads³ on poetry
final might have been our fame's starvation.
Upholding cuisine for us are the French
to be counting in scores and called Gallic.⁴

15 In English and many more, in Chinese
the verb surrounds itself nucleus-fashion
with its subjects and qualifiers.
Down every slope of the wok they go
to the spitting middle, to be sauced,
20 ladled, lidded, steamed, flipped back up,
becoming verbs themselves often

and the calm egg centres the meatloaf.

2006

Endnotes

- Note 1: Persian. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Ancient family of languages including Breton, Welsh, Irish, and Gaelic.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Sometimes said to have been venerated by the ancient Celts.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Of Gaul, the Roman name for the region of France. In French, 20 ("score") is still a base number from 70 to 99.[Return to reference 4](#)

SEAMUS HEANEY

1939–2013

Seamus Heaney was born into a Roman Catholic family in predominantly Protestant North Ireland (or Ulster), and he grew up on a farm in County Derry bordered on one side by a stream that marked the frontier with the largely Catholic Irish Republic (or Eire) to the south. He won scholarships first to St. Columb's College, a Catholic boarding school, and then to Queen's University in Belfast. There he became one of an extraordinary group of Northern Irish poets from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, including Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, who read, discussed, and spurred on one another's work. He taught at Queen's University, before moving in 1972 to the Irish Republic, where he became a citizen and full-time writer. He was Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and in 1995 won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

With "Digging," placed appropriately as the first poem of his first book, Heaney defined his territory. He dug into his memory, uncovering first his father and then, going deeper, his grandfather. This idea of poetry as an archaeological process of recovery took on a darker cast after the eruption of internecine violence—"the Troubles"—in Northern Ireland in 1969, culminating in the 1972 Bloody Sunday killing of thirteen Catholic civilians by British paratroopers during a civil rights march in Derry. Across several volumes, especially *North* (1975), Heaney wrote a series of grim

“bog poems,” about well-preserved Iron Age corpses discovered in the peat of Northern Europe and Ireland. In these poems he sees the bog as a “memory bank,” or unconscious, that preserves everything thrown into it, including the victims of ritual killings. He views contemporary violence through the lens of ancient myths, sacrifices, and feuds, an oblique approach that gives his poetry about the Troubles an unusual depth and resonance. He had discovered emblems for the violence in Northern Ireland in *The Bog People*, a book by the Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob, published in translation in 1969, “the year the killing started.” Heaney wrote of it:

It was chiefly concerned with preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age times. The author . . . argues convincingly that a number of these, and in particular, the Tollund Man, whose head is now preserved near Aarhus in the museum of Silkeborg, were ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess, the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the spring. Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for the cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan [mythic figure emblematic of Mother Ireland], this is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. And the unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles. (“Feeling into Words”)

In the bog poems Heaney reflects on the poet’s responsibilities to write about the dead, yet to do so without prettifying or exploiting them. He probes the vexed relations between lyric song and historical suffering, “beauty and atrocity”: the need to be true to his calling as artist, but also to represent the irredeemable carnage of modern political violence—“the actual weight / of each hooded victim / slashed and dumped” (“The Grauballe Man”). The result is a

tough-minded witnessing, an ethically scrupulous and self-aware mourning of collective loss and sectarian murder.

From the late 1970s Heaney elegized specific victims of the Troubles, such as his acquaintance Louis O'Neill, in "Casualty," as well as more personal losses, such as the natural death of his mother, in "Clearances." He also wrote poems about domestic love, such as "The Sharping Stone." Heaney was thus both a private poet—skillfully kneading grief, love, and wonder into poems about his family and his humble origins—and a public poet, affirming his affinities with the Catholic civil rights movement, which has struggled for centuries against British and Protestant domination. Even in his public poetry he refused slogans, journalistic reportage, and political pieties, scrutinizing instead the wellsprings of collective identity, the ambivalences of individual response to history. Responding obliquely to the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, he reworked a two-thousand-year-old Latin ode by Horace in "Anything Can Happen," and the bombings of the London underground (subway) on July 7, 2005, reverberate in *District and Circle* (2006).

An Irishman writing in the language of the British Empire, he translated Gaelic poetry and renewed specifically Irish traditions, such as the *aisling*, or vision poem, but he was also steeped in the English literary canon, drawing on British poetry from *Beowulf* (his prize-winning translation appears earlier in this anthology) to the works of William Wordsworth, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Ted Hughes. Straddling a multiplicity of divisions, transubstantiating crisscross feelings into unexpected images and intricate sonorities, Heaney's work has been embraced by popular audiences for its accessible style and yet also admired by poets and academic critics for its lyric subtlety and rigorous technique.

Formally, Heaney's poetry ranges from strenuous free verse—the clipped lines and unrhymed quatrains of the bog poems—to more traditional forms, such as the modified terza rima of "Station Island" and the sonnet sequence "Clearances." His poems are earthy and matter-of-fact, saturated with the physical textures, sights, smells,

and sounds of farm life, and they are also visionary, lit up by hope and spirit, enacting penitential pilgrimages and unbridled imaginings. That Heaney's poetry is both earthbound and airborne, free and formed, public and private helps explain why he is seen by many as the most gifted English-language poet of his generation.

Digging

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

5

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills¹
Where he was digging.

10

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

15

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

20

My grandfather cut more turf² in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

25

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

30 Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

1966

Endnotes

- Note 1: Small furrows in which seeds are sown. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Slabs of peat that, when dried, are a common domestic fuel in Ireland. [Return to reference 2](#)

The Grauballe Man¹

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep

5 the black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.
10 His instep has shrunk
cold as a swan's foot
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge
and purse of a mussel,
15 his spine an eel arrested
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
20 of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.
The cured wound
opens inwards to a dark
elderberry place.

25 Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?

Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

30 And his rusted hair,
a mat unlikely
as a foetus's.
I first saw his twisted face

35 in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

40 but now he lies
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,

45 hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul²
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.

1975

Endnotes

- Note 1: A body exhumed from a Danish bog and photographed in P. V. Glob's book *The Bog People*. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Roman marble reproduction of a Greek bronze sculpture depicting a wounded soldier of Gaul, whose matted hair

identifies him as a Celt, in Rome's Capitoline Museum.[Return to reference 2](#)

Punishment¹

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

5 It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

10 I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

15 Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin: ^o_u

20 her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adultress,
before they punished you

25 you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your

tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
30 but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
35 your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
40 wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

1975

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In 1951 the peat-stained body apparently of a young girl, who lived in the late 1st century C.E., was recovered from a bog in Windeby, Germany. As P. V. Glob describes her in *The Bog People*, she "lay naked in the hole in the peat, a bandage over the eyes and a collar round the neck. The band across the eyes was drawn tight and had cut into the neck and the base of the nose. We may feel sure that it had been used to close her eyes to this world. There was no mark of strangulation on the neck,

so that it had not been used for that purpose.” Her hair “had been shaved off with a razor on the left side of the head. . . . When the brain was removed the convolutions and folds of the surface could be clearly seen [Glob reproduces a photograph of her brain]. . . . This girl of only fourteen had had an inadequate winter diet. . . . To keep the young body under, some birch branches and a big stone were laid upon her.” According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the Germanic peoples punished adulterous women by shaving off their hair and then scourging them out of the village or killing them. More recently, her “betraying sisters” were sometimes shaved, stripped, tarred, and handcuffed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to the railings of Belfast in punishment for keeping company with British soldiers.

[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *small cask*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *valleys*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *wrapped, enclosed*[Return to reference °](#)

Casualty

1

He would drink by himself
And raise a weathered thumb
Towards the high shelf,
Calling another rum
And blackcurrant, without
5 Having to raise his voice,
Or order a quick stout^o
By a lifting of the eyes
And a discreet dumb-show
Of pulling off the top;
10 At closing time would go
In waders and peaked cap
Into the showery dark,
A dole-kept¹ breadwinner
But a natural for work.
15 I loved his whole manner,
Sure-footed but too sly,
His deadpan sidling tact,
His fisherman's quick eye
And turned observant back.
20 Incomprehensible
To him, my other life.
Sometimes, on his high stool,
Too busy with his knife
At a tobacco plug
25 And not meeting my eye
In the pause after a slug^o
He mentioned poetry.

We would be on our own
And, always politic
30 And shy of condescension,
I would manage by some trick
To switch the talk to eels
Or lore of the horse and cart
Or the Provisionals.²

35 But my tentative art
His turned back watches too:
He was blown to bits
Out drinking in a curfew
Others obeyed, three nights
40 After they shot dead
The thirteen men in Derry.
PARAS THIRTEEN, the walls said,
BOGSIDE NIL.³ That Wednesday
Everybody held
45 His breath and trembled.

2

It was a day of cold
Raw silence, wind-blown
Surplice and soutane:⁴
50 Rained-on, flower-laden
Coffin after coffin
Seemed to float from the door
Of the packed cathedral
Like blossoms on slow water.
The common funeral
55 Unrolled its swaddling band,⁵
Lapping, tightening
Till we were braced and bound
Like brothers in a ring.

60 But he would not be held
At home by his own crowd
Whatever threats were phoned,
Whatever black flags waved.
I see him as he turned
65 In that bombed offending place,
Remorse fused with terror
In his still knowable face,
His cornered outfaced stare
Blinding in the flash.

70 He had gone miles away
For he drank like a fish
Nightly, naturally
Swimming towards the lure
Of warm lit-up places,
The blurred mesh and murmur
75 Drifting among glasses
In the gregarious smoke.
How culpable was he
That last night when he broke
Our tribe's complicity?⁶
80 'Now you're supposed to be
An educated man,'
I hear him say. 'Puzzle me
The right answer to that one.'

3

85 I missed his funeral,
Those quiet walkers
And sideways talkers
Shoaling out of his lane
To the respectable
Purring of the hearse . . .

90 They move in equal pace
With the habitual
Slow consolation
Of a dawdling engine,
The line lifted, hand
95 Over fist, cold sunshine
On the water, the land
Banked under fog: that morning
I was taken in his boat,
The screw^o purling, turning
100 Indolent fathoms white,
I tasted freedom with him.
To get out early, haul
Steadily off the bottom,
Dispraise the catch, and smile
105 As you find a rhythm
Working you, slow mile by mile,
Into your proper haunt
Somewhere, well out, beyond . . .

110 Dawn-sniffing revenant,^z
Plodder through midnight rain,
Question me again.

1979

Endnotes

- Note 1: That is, receiving unemployment benefits.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The Provisional, paramilitary branch of the IRA.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: This graffito records—in the form of a soccer match score—that the British Army’s Parachute Regiment had killed thirteen people; the Roman Catholic inhabitants of Derry’s Bogside district, none. The IRA bombing occurred after the

killing of Catholic demonstrators on Bloody Sunday, January 30, 1972.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Vestments worn by Roman Catholic priests.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Long cloth in which babies were once wrapped to restrain and warm them.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Roman Catholic community's agreement to obey the curfew (of lines 39–40).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: One returned from the dead.[Return to reference 7](#)

Notes

- °: *strong dark beer*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *gulp of liquor*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *propellor*[Return to reference °](#)

***From Station Island*¹**

12

Like a convalescent, I took the hand
stretched down from the jetty, sensed again
an alien comfort as I stepped on ground

5 to find the helping hand still gripping mine,
fish-cold and bony, but whether to guide
or to be guided I could not be certain

for the tall man in step at my side
seemed blind, though he walked straight as a rush
upon his ash plant,² his eyes fixed straight ahead.

10 Then I knew him in the flesh
out there on the tarmac^o among the cars,
wintered hard and sharp as a blackthorn bush.

15 His voice eddying with the vowels of all rivers³
came back to me, though he did not speak yet,
a voice like a prosecutor's or a singer's,

cunning,⁴ narcotic, mimic, definite
as a steel nib's downstroke, quick and clean,
and suddenly he hit a litter basket

20 with his stick, saying, "Your obligation
is not discharged by any common rite.
What you must do must be done on your own

so get back in harness. The main thing is to write

for the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust
that imagines its haven like your hands at night

25 dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.
You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.
Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,
let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.⁵
Let go, let fly, forget.
You've listened long enough. Now strike your note."

30 It was as if I had stepped free into space
alone with nothing that I had not known
already. Raindrops blew in my face

35 as I came to. "Old father, mother's son,
there is a moment in Stephen's diary
for April the thirteenth, a revelation
set among my stars—that one entry
has been a sort of password in my ears,
the collect of a new epiphany,⁶

40 the Feast of the Holy Tundish."⁷ "Who cares,"
he jeered, "any more? The English language
belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires,
a waste of time for somebody your age.
That subject⁸ people stuff is a cod's⁹ game,
infantile, like your peasant pilgrimage.

45 You lose more of yourself than you redeem
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
When they make the circle wide, it's time to swim
out on your own and fill the element
with signatures on your own frequency,

50 echo soundings, searches, probes, allurements,
 elver-gleams⁸ in the dark of the whole sea.”
 The shower broke in a cloudburst, the tarmac
 fumed and sizzled. As he moved off quickly

55 the downpour loosed its screens round his straight
 walk.

1984

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Station Island is a sequence of dream encounters with familiar ghosts, set on Station Island on Lough Derg in Co. Donegal. The island is also known as St. Patrick’s Purgatory because of a tradition that Patrick was the first to establish the penitential vigil of fasting and praying which still constitutes the basis of the three-day pilgrimage. Each unit of the contemporary pilgrim’s exercises is called a ‘station,’ and a large part of each station involves walking barefoot and praying round the ‘beds,’ stone circles which are said to be the remains of early medieval monastic cells [*Heaney’s note*]. In this last section of the poem, the familiar ghost is that of Heaney’s countryman James Joyce. Compare with the stanza form and encounter with a ghost in T. S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding.”
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Walking stick made of ash, like the one carried by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. Joyce was almost blind.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Anna Livia Plurabelle episode of *Finnegans Wake* resounds with the names of many rivers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: “The only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning” (Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*).[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: As worn by penitents in biblical times and later.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Manifestation of a superhuman being, as of the infant Jesus to the Magi (Matthew 2). In the Christian calendar, the Feast of the Epiphany is January 6. "Epiphany" was also Joyce's term for the "sudden revelation of the whatness of a thing."
"Collect": short prayer assigned to a particular day.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7:
See the end of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* [Heaney's note]: "13 April: That tundish [funnel] has been on my mind for a long time. I looked it up and find it English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us? Damn him one way or the other!"
[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Gleams as of young eels.[Return to reference 8](#)

Notes

- °: *blacktop surface*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *colonized* [Return to reference °](#)
- °: *fool's*[Return to reference °](#)

Clearances

in memoriam M.K.H.,¹ 1911–1984

*She taught me what her uncle once taught her:
How easily the biggest coal block split
If you got the grain and hammer angled right.*

5 *The sound of that relaxed alluring blow,
Its co-opted and obliterated echo,
Taught me to hit, taught me to loosen,*

*Taught me between the hammer and the block
To face the music. Teach me now to listen,
To strike it rich behind the linear black.*

1

10 A cobble thrown a hundred years ago
Keeps coming at me, the first stone
Aimed at a great-grandmother's turncoat brow.²
The pony jerks and the riot's on.
She's crouched low in the trap
Running the gauntlet that first Sunday
15 Down the brae^o to Mass at a panicked gallop.
He whips on through the town to cries of 'Lundy!'³

20 Call her 'The Convert'. 'The Exogamous⁴ Bride'.
Anyhow, it is a genre piece
Inherited on my mother's side
And mine to dispose with now she's gone.
Instead of silver and Victorian lace,
The exonerating, exonerated stone.

2

Polished linoleum shone there. Brass taps shone.
The china cups were very white and big—
25 An unchipped set with sugar bowl and jug.
The kettle whistled. Sandwich and teascone
Were present and correct. In case it run,
The butter must be kept out of the sun.
And don't be dropping crumbs. Don't tilt your chair.
30 Don't reach. Don't point. Don't make noise when you
stir.

It is Number 5, New Row, Land of the Dead,
Where grandfather is rising from his place
With spectacles pushed back on a clean bald head
To welcome a bewildered homing daughter
35 Before she even knocks. 'What's this? What's this?'
And they sit down in the shining room together.

3

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
40 Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our
45 senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives—

50 Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

4

Fear of affectation made her affect
Inadequacy whenever it came to
Pronouncing words 'beyond her'. *Bertold Brek.*⁵
55 She'd manage something hampered and askew
Every time, as if she might betray
The hampered and inadequate by too
Well-adjusted a vocabulary.
With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me, 'You
60 Know all them things.' So I governed my tongue
In front of her, a genuinely well-
adjusted adequate betrayal
Of what I knew better. I'd *naw* and *aye*
And decently relapse into the wrong
65 Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.

5

The cool that came off sheets just off the line
Made me think the damp must still be in them
But when I took my corners of the linen
And pulled against her, first straight down the hem
And then diagonally, then flapped and shook
70 The fabric like a sail in a cross-wind,
They made a dried-out undulating thwack.
So we'd stretch and fold and end up hand to hand
For a split second as if nothing had happened
For nothing had that had not always happened
75 Beforehand, day by day, just touch and go,
Coming close again by holding back
In moves where I was x and she was o

Inscribed in sheets she'd sewn from ripped-out flour
sacks.

6

80 In the first flush of the Easter holidays
The ceremonies during Holy Week
Were highpoints of our *Sons and Lovers*⁶ phase.
The midnight fire. The paschal candlestick.⁷
Elbow to elbow, glad to be kneeling next
85 To each other up there near the front
Of the packed church, we would follow the text
And rubrics⁸ for the blessing of the font.⁸
*As the hind longs for the streams, so my soul . . .*⁹
Dippings. Towellings. The water breathed on.
The water mixed with chrism¹ and with oil.
90 Cruet² tinkle. Formal incensation
And the psalmist's outcry taken up with pride:
*Day and night my tears have been my bread.*³

7

In the last minutes he said more to her
Almost than in all their life together.
95 'You'll be in New Row on Monday night
And I'll come up for you and you'll be glad
When I walk in the door . . . Isn't that right?'
His head was bent down to her propped-up head.
She could not hear but we were overjoyed.
100 He called her good and girl. Then she was dead,
The searching for a pulsebeat was abandoned
And we all knew one thing by being there.
The space we stood around had been emptied
Into us to keep, it penetrated
Clearances that suddenly stood open.

105 High cries were felled and a pure change happened.

8

I thought of walking round and round a space
Utterly empty, utterly a source
Where the decked chestnut tree had lost its place
110 In our front hedge above the wallflowers.
The white chips jumped and jumped and skited⁴
high.
I heard the hatchet's differentiated
Accurate cut, the crack, the sigh
And collapse of what luxuriated
115 Through the shocked tips and wreckage of it all.
Deep planted and long gone, my coeval⁵
Chestnut from a jam jar in a hole,
Its heft and hush become a bright nowhere,
A soul ramifying and forever
120 Silent, beyond silence listened for.

1987

Endnotes

- Note 1: Margaret Kathleen Heaney, the poet's mother.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Heaney's Protestant great-grandmother married a Catholic.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: That is, traitor. In 1688 the Irish colonel Robert Lundy knew that Derry (or Londonderry) would be invaded by the English, but failed to prepare adequate defenses.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Married outside the group.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), German playwright.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Novel (1913) by the English writer D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) that largely centers on the oedipal relationship between a mother and son.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Large candle lit during a ceremony on Holy Saturday, which precedes Easter Sunday.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Receptacle for holy water.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Psalms 42:1.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Mixture of olive oil and balsam.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Small vessel for wine or water.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Psalms 42:3.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Shot off obliquely.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Of the same age.[Return to reference 5](#)

Notes

- °: *steep slope*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *rules*[Return to reference °](#)

Anything Can Happen

after Horace, *Odes*, 1, 34¹

Anything can happen. You know how Jupiter²
Will mostly wait for clouds to gather head
Before he hurls the lightning? Well, just now
He galloped his thunder cart and his horses

5 Across a clear blue sky. It shook the earth
And the clogged underearth, the River Styx,³
The winding streams, the Atlantic shore itself.
Anything can happen, the tallest towers

10 Be overturned, those in high places daunted,
Those overlooked regarded. Stropped-beak⁴ Fortune
Swoops, making the air gasp, tearing the crest off
one,
Setting it down bleeding on the next.

15 Ground gives. The heaven's weight
Lifts up off Atlas like a kettle-lid.
Capstones shift, nothing resettles right.
Telluric⁵ ash and fire-spores boil away.

2001, 2006

Endnotes

- Note 1: See *Odes* (23 B.C.E.), books of lyric poetry by the Roman poet and satirist Horace (65–8 B.C.E.). Although he follows aspects of Horace's poem, Heaney drops Horace's first stanza and adds a new final stanza. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Supreme Roman god, whose weapon was the thunderbolt.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Greek mythology, a river in the underworld, over which the shades of the dead were ferried.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: With a beak with a sharpened edge.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Of the earth or soil. "Atlas": one of the Titans in Greek mythology, he was condemned to hold up the heavens. "Capstones": stones that crown structures, typically walls.[Return to reference 5](#)

Environmental Literature and Climate Change

Nature has always been a source of literary inspiration, but the modern Western understanding of the environment as under threat and in need of protection begins with the conservation movements of the late nineteenth century. English social reformer Octavia Hill (1838–1912) advocated for the importance of open spaces and co-founded the National Trust in 1895 to create parks and greenbelts accessible to the public in the United Kingdom. The Open Space movement, named after Hill's essay on the topic, emphasized preservation of nature for human enjoyment, but the priorities of environmental activists shifted in the wake of World War II and with the rise of environmental justice movements across the globe. The atomic fallout of nuclear weapons, the cancerous effects of pesticide use, and the displacement of Indigenous and poor peoples from land earmarked for oil drilling, dam building, and deforestation widened the scope of environmentalism to include matters of social justice and climate change. While environmental literature commemorating the beauty of natural landscapes remains powerful, authors writing in the contemporary era also convey more dystopian, tragic, and surreal views of Earth's habitats.

Since the eighteenth century, humans have been warming the planet by burning fossil fuels, which create atmospheric gases that trap the sun's energy. The latter half of the twentieth century, known among climate scientists as "The Great Acceleration," saw the Earth warming at rates not seen for millennia. In response to the intensification of climate change, biologist Eugene Stoermer and Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen have proposed that human beings are living in a new geological epoch called the "Anthropocene." The Anthropocene remains an unofficial unit of geological time; however, there is now a scientific consensus around

the existence of anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change. Such awareness has served as a major rallying point for diverse writers of environmental literature who explore the impact of human beings on Earth systems. The writers featured in this cluster hail from around the English-speaking world, and their fiction, nonfiction, and poetry reveal the interdependence of nature and culture in a world profoundly endangered by human activity.

Stories of natural disaster illustrate ambivalence toward the advances of human civilization and connect traditionally literary fiction to neighboring genres such as science fiction and testimony. J. G. Ballard, a leading author of the "New Wave" movement, brought popular and pulp forms of science fiction into conversation with the literary traditions of modernism and postmodernism. *The Drowned World* (1962) is the second of his four "elemental novels," dedicated to representing the awesome powers of wind, water, fire, and earth. Although Ballard's novel is not overtly about climate change, his imagery of drowned cities and makeshift boats on city streets supplies an influential iconography for climate-change fiction or cli-fi to come. Bessie Head employs traditionally realist narrative strategies in "Looking for a Rain God" (1977) to depict extreme weather. Chronicling the increasingly desperate plight of villagers in rural Botswana, Head drew on real-world events to offer an anguished portrait of how drought underpins social interactions and rituals of sacrifice.

Industrial development is a central theme in literary fiction preoccupied by environmental and climate justice. Ben Okri's "What the Tapster Saw" (1988) offers a nightmarish vision of the Niger Delta, the site of some of the most damaging oil spills in the world. Okri uses surreal images, at one point transforming an oil spill into a giant snake, to capture the monstrosity of the global petroleum industry's effects on multispecies habitats and local Nigerian industries and trades. Arundhati Roy, like Okri, experiments with narrative perspective and description, to capture the ecological ravaging of a resource-rich, biodiverse place. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), the protagonist returns to the Kerala backwaters of her youth to discover that its beauty has made it an international

tourist attraction and resort destination. Roy uses an abundance of descriptive detail to introduce the fragile networks of life sacrificed for the sake of progress and modernization.

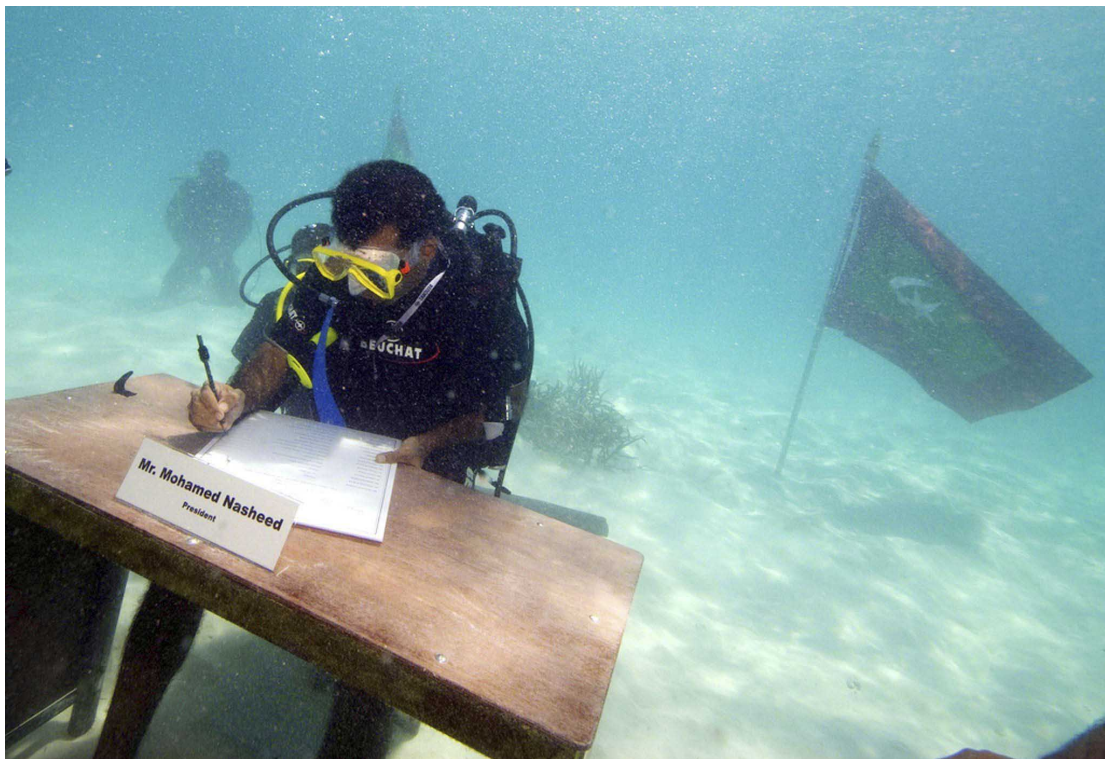


Climate Protests in London, 2019. Students march past the Houses of Parliament during the international school strike for climate.

Nonfiction plays a special role in the history of environmental literature, in particular the genre of nature-writing, which blends elements of memoir, reportage, and travelogue to capture the specificities of place over time. Amitav Ghosh, a novelist, nonfiction writer, and self-described descendant of ecological refugees, argues in *The Great Derangement* that nonfiction has historically outpaced fiction in its capacity to represent climate change. For Ghosh, traditional forms of literary fiction struggle to register the mundane

aspects of environmental damage and the invisible changes to Earth's atmosphere. Nature writing, as evidenced in Robert Macfarlane's *Underworld*, centralizes land, place, and life cycles in ways that human-centered fictions have not always prioritized.

Ghosh and Macfarlane's recalculations of human time within the deep time of the planet set the stage for a selection of twenty-first-century poems that address climate change. These poems treat the representation of climate change as an aesthetic challenge. To do so is not to minimize the material effects of environmental destruction, but to make their consequences more visible and more palpable.



Underwater Cabinet Meeting in the Maldives. The Maldives is located in the Indian Ocean and, as a low-lying country, faces inundation from rising sea levels. In 2009 the nation's president, Mohamed Nasheed, drew attention to the crisis by convening an underwater cabinet meeting, during which he signed a declaration calling for global action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

J. G. BALLARD

James Graham Ballard (1930–2009) was born in Shanghai, China, where his father was the managing director of a printing company. The family lived in an extraterritorial area known as the Shanghai International Settlement, where British residents were not subject to local Chinese law. When Japan invaded this area during World War II, the Ballard family was sent to an internment camp where they lived for two years. Ballard has described the camp as a place where he witnessed extreme violence and yet retained a childish sense of play and imagination. His experience in the camp directly informs his novel *Empire of the Sun* (1984), but the larger ironies spurred by the co-existence of violence and normalcy also underpin major works like *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969), *Crash* (1973), *Concrete Island* (1974), and *High Rise* (1975). These works establish Ballard's fascination with the fallout of new technologies and the effects of hypermodern environments on the psychology of their inhabitants.

Ballard returned to England in 1945 after the end of World War II. He attended the University of Cambridge and planned to become a psychiatrist, but shifted to writing science fiction under the influence of surrealism. *The Drowned World* (1962), set in a post-apocalyptic future London, illustrates his concept of "inner space," in which external reality merges with the inner workings of the mind, particularly the sex and death drives associated with the work of Sigmund Freud. In the excerpt included here, the scientist-protagonist Kerans attempts to find Lieutenant Hardman, who, after falling ill and possibly going insane, abandons his team of researchers without clear motivation. Ballard defamiliarizes the city, turning it into a "necropolis" in which strange flora and fauna have overtaken landmarks like the British Museum, described in turn through archaic and spectral language. The vision of the end of civilization, in which rising seas reclaim areas of human settlement, has made *The Drowned World* a classic work of environmental

dystopia. Whether the flood is a form of biblical renewal or a psychoanalytic invitation to return to the womb is left ambiguous, but Ballard's inner spaces offer an unusual glimpse into the built environments of modernity and the dark fantasies they hold in check.

From The Drowned World

The Causeways of the Sun

As Kerans had prophesied, they found Hardman among the silt flats.

Descending to three hundred feet above the water, they began to rake up and down the distal¹ five-mile length of the main channel. The huge banks of silt lifted above the surface like the backs of yellow sperm whales. Wherever the hydrodynamic contours of the channel gave the silt banks any degree of permanence, the surrounding jungle spilled from the rooftops and rooted itself in the damp loam, matting the whole morass into an immovable structure. From the hatchway Kerans scrutinised the narrow beaches under the outer edge of the fern trees, watching for the tell-tale signs of a camouflaged raft or makeshift hut.

After twenty minutes, however, and a dozen careful sweeps of the channel, Riggs turned from the hatchway with a rueful shake of his head.

"You're probably right, Robert, but it's a hopeless job. Hardman's no fool, if he wants to hide from us we'll never find him. Even if he were leaning out of a window and waving, ten to one we wouldn't see him."

Kerans murmured in reply, watching the surface below. Each of the tracking runs was about a hundred yards to the starboard of the previous one, and for the last three runs he had been watching the semicircular crescent of what appeared to be a large apartment block standing in the angle between the channel and the southern bank of a small creek which ran off into the surrounding jungle. The upper eight or nine storeys of the block stood above the water, enclosing a low mound of muddy-brown silt. The surface streamed with water draining away from a collection of shallow pools covering it. Two hours earlier the bank had been a sheet of wet mud, but by

ten o'clock, as the helicopter flew over, the mud was beginning to dry and grow firm. To Kerans, shielding his eyes from the reflected sunlight, its smooth surface appeared to be scored by two faint parallel lines, about six feet apart, that led across to the jutting roof of an almost submerged balcony. As they swept overhead he tried to see under the concrete slab, but its mouth was choked with refuse and rotting logs.

He touched Riggs' arm and pointed to the tracks, so immersed in tracing their winding progress to the balcony that he almost failed to notice the equally distinct pattern of imprints emerging in the drying surface between the lines, spaced some four feet apart, unmistakably the footsteps of a tall powerful man hauling a heavy load.

As the noise of the helicopter's engine faded out on the roof above them, Riggs and Macready bent down and inspected the crude catamaran hidden behind a screen of bocage² under the balcony. Fashioned from two drop-tanks lashed to either end of a metal bed-frame, its twin grey hulls were still streaked with silt. Clumps of mud from Hardman's feet crossed the room opening on to the balcony and disappeared through the suite into the adjacent corridor.

"This is it without a doubt—agree, Sergeant?" Riggs asked, stepping out into the sunlight to look up at the crescent of apartment blocks. A chain of autonomous units, they were linked by short causeways between the elevator wells at the end of each building. Most of the windows were broken, the cream facing tiles covered by huge patches of fungus, and the whole complex looked like an over-ripe camembert cheese.³

Macready knelt down by one of the hulls, cleaning away the silt, then traced out the code number painted across the bow. "UNAF 22-H-549—that's us, sir. The drop tanks were being cleared out yesterday, we'd stored them on C-Deck. He must have taken a spare bed from the sick-bay after ward-roll."

"Good." Rubbing his hands together with pleasure, Riggs stepped over to Kerans, smiling jauntily, his self-confidence and good humour

fully restored. "Excellent, Robert. Superb diagnostic skill. You were quite right, of course." He peered shrewdly at Kerans, as if speculating on the real sources of this remarkable insight, invisibly marking him off. "Cheer up, Hardman will be grateful to you when we take him back."

Kerans stood on the edge of the balcony, the slope of caking silt below him. He looked up at the silent curve of windows, wondering which of the thousand or so rooms would be Hardman's hiding-place. "I hope you're right. You've still got to catch him."

"Don't worry. We will." Riggs began to shout up at the two men on the roof, helping Daley lash down the helicopter. "Wilson, keep a look-out from the south-west end; Caldwell, you work your way across to the north. Keep an eye on both sides, he might try to swim for it."

The two men saluted and moved off, their carbines⁴ held at their hips. Macready cradled a Thompson gun in the crook of his arm, and as Riggs unbuttoned the flap of his holster Kerans said quietly: "Colonel, we're not tracking down a wild dog."

Riggs waved this aside. "Relax, Robert, it's just that I don't want my leg bitten off by some sleeping croc. Though as a matter of interest"—here he flashed Kerans a gleaming smile—"Hardman has got a '45 Colt with him."

Leaving Kerans to digest this, he picked up the electric megaphone.

"Hardman! ! This is Colonel Riggs! !" He bellowed Hardman's name at the silent heat, then winked at Kerans and added: *"Dr. Kerans wants to talk to you, Lieutenant! !"*

Focused by the crescent of buildings, the sounds echoed away across the swamps and creeks, booming distantly over the great empty mudflats. Around them everything glistened in the immense heat, and the men on the roof fretted nervously under their forage caps. A thick cloacal⁵ stench exuded from the silt flat, a corona of a million insects pulsing and humming hungrily above it, and a sudden spasm of nausea knotted Kerans' gullet, for a moment dizzying him. Pressing a wrist tightly to his forehead, he leaned back against a

pillar, listening to the echoes reverberate around him. Four hundred yards away two white-faced clock towers protruded through the vegetation, like the temple spires of some lost jungle religion, and the sounds of his name—"*Kerans ... Kerans ... Kerans*"—reflected off them seemed to Kerans to toll with an intense premonition of terror and disaster, the meaningless orientation of the clock hands identifying him, more completely than anything he had previously experienced, with all the confused and minatory spectres that cast their shadows more and more darkly through his mind, the myriad-handed mandala⁶ of cosmic time.

His name still echoed faintly in his ears as they began their search of the building. He took up his position at the stairwell at the centre of each corridor while Riggs and Macready inspected the apartments, keeping a look-out as they climbed the floors. The building had been gutted. All the floorboards had rotted or been ripped out, and they moved slowly along the tiled inlays, stepping warily from one concrete tie-beam to another. Most of the plaster had slipped from the walls and lay in grey heaps along the skirting boards. Wherever sunlight filtered through, the bare lathes⁷ were intertwined with creeper and wire-moss, and the original fabric of the building seemed solely supported by the profusion of vegetation ramifying through every room and corridor.

Through the cracks in the floors rose the stench of the greasy water swirling through the windows below. Disturbed for the first time in many years, the bats which hung from the tilting picture rails flew frantically for the windows, dispersing with cries of pain in the brilliant sunlight. Lizards scuttered and darted through the floor cracks, or skated desperately around the dry baths in the bathrooms.

Exacerbated by the heat, Riggs' impatience mounted as they climbed the floors and had covered all but the top two without success.

"Well, where is he?" Riggs rested against the stair-rail, gesturing for quiet, and listened to the silent building, breathing tightly

through his teeth. "We'll stand easy for five minutes, Sergeant. Now's the time for caution. He's somewhere around here."

Macready slung his Thompson over his shoulder and climbed to the fan-light on the next landing which let in a thin breeze. Kerans leaned against the wall, the sweat pouring across his back and chest, temples thudding from the exertion of mounting the stairs. It was 11.30, and the temperature outside was well over 120 degrees. He looked down at Riggs' flushed pink face, admiring the Colonel's self-discipline and single-mindedness.

"Don't look so condescending, Robert. I know I'm sweating like a pig, but I haven't had as much rest as you lately."

The two men exchanged glances, each aware of the conflict of attitude towards Hardman, and Kerans, in an effort to resolve the rivalry between them, said quietly: "You'll probably catch him now, Colonel."

Searching for somewhere to sit, he walked off down the corridor and pushed back the door into the first apartment.

As he unlatched the door the frame collapsed weakly into a litter of worm-eaten dust and timbers, and he stepped across it to the wide french windows overlooking the balcony. A little air funnelled through, and Kerans let it play over his face and chest, surveying the jungle below. The promontory on which the crescent of apartment houses stood had at one time been a small hill, and a number of the buildings visible beneath the vegetation on the other side of the silt flat were still above the flood-waters. Kerans stared at the two clock towers jutting up like white obelisks above the fern fronds. The yellow air of the noon high seemed to press down like a giant translucent counterpane on the leafy spread, a thousand motes of light spitting like diamonds whenever a bough moved and deflected the sun's rays. The obscured outline of a classical portico and colonnaded façade below the towers suggested that the buildings were once part of some small municipal centre. One of the clockfaces was without its hands; the other, by coincidence, had stopped at almost exactly the right time—11.35. Kerans wondered whether the clock was not in fact working, tended by some mad

recluse clinging to a last meaningless register of sanity, though if the mechanism were still operable Riggs might well perform that role. Several times, before they abandoned one of the drowned cities, he had wound the two-ton mechanism of some rusty cathedral clock and they had sailed off to a last carillon⁸ of chimes across the water. For nights afterwards, in his dreams Kerans had seen Riggs dressed as William Tell, striding about in a huge Dalinian landscape,⁹ planting immense dripping sundials like daggers in the fused sand.

Kerans leaned against the window, waiting as the minutes passed and left behind the clock fixed at 11.35, overtaking it like a vehicle in a faster lane. Or was it not stationary (guaranteed though it would be to tell the time with complete, unquestionable accuracy twice a day—more than most time-pieces) but merely so slow that its motion *appeared* to be imperceptible? The slower a clock, the nearer it approximated to the infinitely gradual and majestic progression of cosmic time—in fact, by reversing a clock's direction and running it backwards one could devise a timepiece that in a sense was moving even more slowly than the universe, and consequently part of an even greater spatiotemporal system.

Kerans' amusement at this notion was distracted by his discovery among the clutter of debris on the opposite bank of a small cemetery sloping down into the water, its leaning headstones advancing to their crowns like a party of bathers. He remembered again one ghastly cemetery over which they had moored, its ornate Florentine tombs cracked and sprung, corpses floating out in their unravelling winding-sheets in a grim rehearsal of the Day of Judgement.

Averting his eyes, he turned away from the window, with a jolt realised that a tall black-bearded man was standing motionlessly in a doorway behind him. Startled, Kerans stared uncertainly at the figure, with an effort reassembling his thoughts. The big man stood in a slightly stooped but relaxed pose, his heavy arms loosely at his sides. Black mud caked across his wrists and forehead, and clogged his boots and the fabric of his drill trousers, for a moment reminding Kerans of one of the resurrected corpses. His bearded chin was sunk

between his broad shoulders, the impression of constraint and fatigue heightened by the medical orderly's blue denim jacket several sizes too small which he wore, the corporal's stripe pulled up over the swell of his deltoid muscles. The expression on his face was one of hungry intensity, but he gazed at Kerans with sombre detachment, his eyes like heavily banked fires, a thin glow of interest in the biologist the only outward show of the energy within.

Kerans waited until his eyes adjusted themselves to the darkness at the rear of the room, looking involuntarily at the bedroom doorway through which the bearded man had stepped. He reached out one hand to him, half-afraid of breaking the spell between them, warning him not to move, and elicited in return an expression of curiously understanding sympathy, almost as if their roles were reversed.

"Hardman!" Kerans whispered.

With a galvanic leap, Hardman flung himself at Kerans, his big frame blocking off half the room, fainted just before they collided and swerved past, before Kerans could regain his balance had jumped out on to the balcony and climbed over the rail.

"*Hardman!*" As one of the men on the roof shouted the alarm Kerans reached the balcony. Hardman swung himself like an acrobat down the drain-pipe to the parapet below. Riggs and Macready dived into the room. Holding on to his hat, Riggs pivoted out over the rail, swore as Hardman disappeared into the apartment.

"Good man, Kerans. You nearly held him!" Together they ran back into the corridor and raced down the stairway, saw Hardman swinging around the banisters four floors below, hurling himself from one landing to the next in a single stride.

When they reached the lowest floor they were thirty seconds behind Hardman, and a medley of excited shouts were coming from the roof. But Riggs paused stock-still on the balcony.

"Good God, he's trying to drag his raft back into the water!"

Thirty yards away, Hardman was dragging the catamaran across the caking mass of silt, the tow-rope over his shoulders, jerking its bows into the air with demoniac energy.

Riggs buttoned the flap of his holster, sadly shaking his head. There was a full fifty yards to the water's edge, and Hardman was sinking up to his knees in the damper silt, oblivious of the men on the roof looking down at him. Finally he tossed away the tow-rope and seized the bed-frame in both hands, began to wrench it along in slow painful jerks, the denim jacket splitting down his back.

Riggs stepped up on to the balcony, gesturing to Wilson and Caldwell to come down. "Poor devil. He looks all in. Doctor, you stay close; you may be able to pacify him."

Carefully they closed in on Hardman. The five men, Riggs, Macready, the two soldiers and Kerans, advanced down the sloping crust, shielding their eyes from the intense sunlight. Like a wounded water-buffalo, Hardman continued to wrestle in the mud ten yards in front of them. Kerans motioned to the others to stay still and then walked forwards with Wilson, a blond-haired youth who had once been Hardman's orderly. Wondering what to say to Hardman, he cleared the knots of phlegm from his throat.

On the roof behind them there was a sudden staccato roar of exhaust, splitting the silence of the tableau. A few steps behind Wilson, Kerans hesitated, saw Riggs look up in annoyance at the helicopter. Assuming that their mission was now over, Daley had started his engine, and the blades were swinging slowly through the air.

Roused from his attempt to reach the water, Hardman looked around at the group encircling him, released the catamaran and crouched down behind it. Wilson began to wade forward precariously through the soft silt along the water's edge, the carbine held across his chest. As he sank up to his waist he shouted at Kerans, his voice lost in the mounting roar of the engine, exhaust spitting in sharp cracks over their heads. Suddenly Wilson swayed, and before Kerans could steady him Hardman leaned across the catamaran, the big Colt '45 in his hand, and fired at them. The flame from the barrel stabbed through the dazzling air, and with a short cry Wilson fell across the carbine, then rolled back clutching a

bloodied elbow, his forage cap cuffed off his head by the discharge wave of the explosion.

As the other men began to retreat up the slope Hardman holstered the revolver in his belt, turned and ran off along the water's edge to the buildings that merged into the jungle a hundred yards away.

Pursued by the ascending roar of the helicopter, they raced after Hardman, Riggs and Kerans helping the injured Wilson, stumbling in and out of the pot-holes left by the men ahead. At the edge of the silt flat the jungle rose in a high green cliff, tier upon tier of fern-trees and giant club moss flowering from the terraces. Without hesitating, Hardman plunged into a narrow interval between two ancient cobbled walls, and disappeared down the alley-way, Macready and Caldwell twenty yards behind him.

"Keep after him, Sergeant!" Riggs bellowed when Macready paused to wait for the Colonel. "We've nearly got him; he's beginning to tire." To Kerans he confided: "God, what a shambles!" He pointed hopelessly at the huge figure of Hardman pounding away in long strides. "What's driving the man on? I've a damn' good mind to let him go and get on with it."

Wilson had recovered sufficiently to walk unaided, and Kerans left him and broke into a run. "He'll be all right, Colonel. I'll try to talk to Hardman; there's a chance I may be able to hold him."

From the alley-way they emerged into a small square, where a group of sedate 19th-century municipal buildings looked down on an ornate fountain. Wild orchids and magnolia entwined themselves around the grey ionic columns of the old courthouse, a miniature sham-Parthenon with a heavy sculptured portico,¹ but otherwise the square had survived intact the assaults of the previous fifty years, its original floor still well above the surrounding water level. Next to the courthouse with the faceless clock tower, was a second colonnaded building, a library or museum,² its white pillars gleaming in the sunlight like a row of huge bleached bones.

Nearing noon, the sun filled this antique forum with a harsh burning light, and Hardman stopped and looked back uncertainly at

the men following him, then stumbled up the steps into the courthouse. Signalling to Kerans and Caldwell, Macready backed away among the statues in the square and took up his position behind the bowl of the fountain.

"Doctor, it's too dangerous now! He may not recognise you. We'll wait until the heat lifts; he can't move from there. Doctor —"

Kerans ignored him. He advanced slowly across the cracked flagstones, both forearms up over his eyes, and placed one foot insecurely on the first step. Somewhere among the shadows he could hear Hardman's exhausted breathing, pumping the scalding air into his lungs.

Shaking the square with its noise, the helicopter soared slowly overhead, and Riggs and Wilson hurried up the steps into the museum entrance, watching as the tail rotor turned the machine in a diminishing spiral. Together the noise and the heat drummed at Kerans' brain, bludgeoning him like a thousand clubs, clouds of dust billowing around him. Abruptly the helicopter began to lose lift, with an agonised acceleration of its engine slid out of the air into the square, then picked up just before it touched the ground. Ducking away, Kerans sheltered with Macready behind the fountain, while the aircraft jerked about over their heads. As it revolved, the tail rotor lashed into the portico of the courthouse, in an explosion of splintered marble the helicopter porpoised and plunged heavily on to the cobbles, the shattered tail propeller rotating eccentrically. Cutting his engine, Daley sat back at his controls, half stunned by the impact with the ground and trying helplessly to remove his harness.

Frustrated at this second attempt to catch Hardman, they crouched in the shadows below the portico of the museum, waiting for the noon high to subside. As if illuminated by immense searchlights, a vast white glare lit the grey stone of the buildings around the square, like an over-exposed photograph, reminding Kerans of the chalk-white colonnade of an Egyptian necropolis.³ As the sun mounted to its zenith⁴ the reflected light began to glimmer upwards from the paving stones. Periodically, while he tended Wilson and

settled him with a few grains of morphine, Kerans could see the other men as they kept up their watch for Hardman, fanning themselves slowly with their forage caps.

Ten minutes later, shortly after noon, he looked up at the square. Completely obscured by the light and glare, the buildings on the other side of the fountain were no longer continuously visible, looming in and out of the air like the architecture of a spectral city. In the centre of the square, by the edge of the fountain, a tall solitary figure was standing, the pulsing thermal gradients every few seconds inverting the normal perspectives and magnifying him fleetingly. Hardman's sun-burnt face and black beard were now chalk-white, his mud-stained clothes glinting in the blinding sunlight like sheets of gold.

Kerans pulled himself to his knees, waiting for Macready to leap forward at him, but the Sergeant, with Riggs beside him, was huddled against a pillar, his eyes staring blankly at the floor in front of them, as if asleep or entranced.

Stepping away from the fountain, Hardman moved slowly across the square, in and out of the shifting curtains of light. He passed within twenty feet of Kerans, who knelt hidden behind the column, one hand on Wilson's shoulder, quietening the man's low grumbling. Skirting the helicopter, Hardman reached the far end of the courthouse and there left the square, walking steadily up a narrow incline towards the silt banks which stretched along the shore a hundred yards away.

Acknowledging his escape, the intensity of the sunlight diminished fractionally.

"Colonel Riggs!"

Macready plunged down the steps, shielding his eyes from the glare, and pointed off across the silt flat with his Thompson. Riggs followed him, hatless, his thin shoulders pinched together, tired and dispirited.

He put a restraining hand on Macready's elbow. "Let him go, Sergeant. We'll never catch him now. There doesn't seem to be much point, anyway."

Safely two hundred yards away, Hardman was still moving strongly, undeterred by the furnace-like heat. He reached the first crest, partly hidden in the huge palls of steam which hung over the centre of the silt flat, fading into them like a man disappearing into a deep mist. The endless banks of the inland sea stretched out in front of him, merging at their edges into the incandescent sky so that to Kerans he seemed to be walking across dunes of white-hot ash into the very mouth of the sun.

For the next two hours he sat quietly in the museum, waiting for the cutter⁵ to arrive, listening to Riggs' irritated grumbling and Daley's lame excuses. Drained by the heat, Kerans tried to sleep, but the occasional crack of a carbine jolted through his bruised brain like the kick of a leather boot. Attracted by the sounds of the helicopter, a school of iguana had approached, and the reptiles were now sidling around the edges of the square, braying at the men on the steps of the museum. Their harsh shrieking voices filled Kerans with a dull fear that persisted even after the cutter's arrival and their return journey to the base. Sitting in the comparative coolness under the wire hood, the green banks of the channel sliding past, he could hear their raucous barks.

At the base he settled Wilson in the sick-bay, then sought out Dr. Bodkin and described the events of the morning, referring in passing to the voices of the iguanas. Enigmatically, Bodkin only nodded to himself, then remarked: "Bewarned, Robert; you may hear them again."

About Hardman's escape he made no comment.

Kerans' catamaran was still moored across the lagoon, so he decided to spend the night in his cabin at the testing station. There he passed a quiet afternoon, nursing a light fever in his bunk, thinking of Hardman and his strange southward odyssey, and of the silt banks glowing like luminous gold in the meridian⁶ sun, both forbidding and inviting, like the lost but forever beckoning and unattainable shores of the amnionic⁷ paradise.

Endnotes

- Note 1: The outer area.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A mixed woodland and pasture landscape. “Catamaran”: a type of multi-hulled boat.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A very soft cheese.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A type of rifle.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Sewer.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A geometric design with spiritual uses in Hinduism and Buddhism.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A supporting structure.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Song played by a set of bells in a tower.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Reference to Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dalí (1904–1989). Dalí painted *The Enigma of William Tell* in 1933. William Tell was a Swiss folk hero, but the painting is actually of Vladimir Lenin, who is identified with Tell.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A covered entryway. “Sham-Parthenon”: an imitation of the Parthenon, a Grecian temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, now in ruins.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The British Museum, located in the Bloomsbury area of London.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: An elaborately designed cemetery, of which ancient Egypt had many.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The point when the sun is directly above an observer.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A type of small boat.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: An imaginary circle passing through the poles and zenith of the Earth.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Like the amnion, the membrane that encloses an embryo and is filled with watery, amniotic fluid.[Return to reference 7](#)

BESSIE HEAD

Bessie Head (1937–1986) was born to a White mother and Black father in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, in the era of apartheid, when interracial relationships were strictly outlawed. Her mother was married to a White Australian immigrant, but the marriage was rocky, and Head was the result of an affair. She never knew her biological father and had little contact with the family that placed her mother in the Fort Napier Mental Institution upon discovering her pregnancy. Head faced hardship from a very young age. Sent to a White foster family as a baby, she was rejected for her mixed-race appearance and placed with a Coloured family (an apartheid-era designation for those of mixed race) with whom she lived for thirteen years, under the misapprehension that they were her biological family. Upon moving to an orphanage school as a teenager, she was informed by a school officer that the woman who raised her was not her mother, that her mother was White, and that her mother had gone insane. This childhood trauma would mark the rest of Head's life. It shaped her writing and self-imposed exile from South Africa to the neighboring nation of Botswana.

Head published four novels in her lifetime, the first of which, *Where Rainclouds Gather* (1968), drew on her experience working on a farm in Botswana. Head combines psychological realism with fascinatingly detailed accounts of rural and village life. Her later novels *Maru* (1971) and particularly *A Question of Power* (1973) connect psychological trauma to changes in weather cycles as if to suggest that cycles of creation, destruction, and rejuvenation in the natural world also shape narratives of human resilience and survival. In "Looking for a Rain God," originally published in the short story collection *The Collector of Treasures* (1977), Head returns her focus to village life in Botswana, one of the most drought-prone countries in the world. The story depicts the brutality of waiting for a rain that

never comes and the desperate acts that bring tribal cultural practices into conflict with official state laws.

Looking for a Rain God

It is lonely at the lands where the people go to plough. These lands are vast clearings in the bush,¹ and the wild bush is lonely too. Nearly all the lands are within walking distance from the village. In some parts of the bush where the underground water is very near the surface, people made little rest camps for themselves and dug shallow wells to quench their thirst while on their journey to their own lands. They experienced all kinds of things once they left the village. They could rest at shady watering places full of lush, tangled trees with delicate pale-gold and purple wild flowers springing up between soft green moss and the children could hunt around for wild figs and any berries that might be in season. But from 1958, a seven-year drought fell upon the land and even the watering places began to look as dismal as the dry open thorn-bush country; the leaves of the trees curled up and withered; the moss became dry and hard and, under the shade of the tangled trees, the ground turned a powdery black and white, because there was no rain. People said rather humorously that if you tried to catch the rain in a cup it would only fill a teaspoon. Towards the beginning of the seventh year of drought, the summer had become an anguish to live through. The air was so dry and moisture-free that it burned the skin. No one knew what to do to escape the heat and tragedy was in the air. At the beginning of that summer, a number of men just went out of their homes and hung themselves to death from trees. The majority of the people had lived off crops, but for two years past they had all returned from the lands with only their rolled-up skin blankets and cooking utensils. Only the charlatans, incanters, and witch-doctors² made a pile of money during this time because people were always turning to them in desperation for little talismans and herbs to rub on the plough for the crops to grow and the rain to fall.

The rains were late that year. They came in early November, with a promise of good rain. It wasn't the full, steady downpour of the years of good rain, but thin, scanty, misty rain. It softened the earth and a rich growth of green things sprang up everywhere for the animals to eat. People were called to the village kgotla³ to hear the proclamation of the beginning of the ploughing season; they stirred themselves and whole families began to move off to the lands to plough.

The family of the old man, Mokgobja, were among those who left early for the lands. They had a donkey cart and piled everything onto it, Mokgobja—who was over seventy years old; two little girls, Neo and Boseyong; their mother Tiro and an unmarried sister, Nesta; and the father and supporter of the family, Ramadi, who drove the donkey cart. In the rush of the first hope of rain, the man, Ramadi, and the two women, cleared the land of thorn-bush and then hedged their vast ploughing area with this same thorn-bush to protect the future crop from the goats they had brought along for milk. They cleared out and deepened the old well with its pool of muddy water and still in this light, misty rain, Ramadi inspanned two oxen and turned the earth over with a hand plough.

The land was ready and ploughed, waiting for the crops. At night, the earth was alive with insects singing and rustling about in search of food. But suddenly, by mid-November, the rain fled away; the rain-clouds fled away and left the sky bare. The sun danced dizzily in the sky, with a strange cruelty. Each day the land was covered in a haze of mist as the sun sucked up the last drop of moisture out of the earth. The family sat down in despair, waiting and waiting. Their hopes had run so high; the goats had started producing milk, which they had eagerly poured on their porridge, now they ate plain porridge with no milk. It was impossible to plant the corn, maize, pumpkin and water-melon seeds in the dry earth. They sat the whole day in the shadow of the huts and even stopped thinking, for the rain had fled away. Only the children, Neo and Boseyong, were quite happy in their little girl world. They carried on with their game of making house like their mother and chattered to

each other in light, soft tones. They made children from sticks around which they tied rags, and scolded them severely in an exact imitation of their own mother. Their voices could be heard scolding the day long: 'You stupid thing, when I send you to draw water, why do you spill half of it out of the bucket!' 'You stupid thing! Can't you mind the porridge-pot without letting the porridge burn!' And then they would beat the rag-dolls on their bottoms with severe expressions.

The adults paid no attention to this; they did not even hear the funny chatter; they sat waiting for rain; their nerves were stretched to breaking-point willing the rain to fall out of the sky. Nothing was important, beyond that. All their animals had been sold during the bad years to purchase food, and of all their herd only two goats were left. It was the women of the family who finally broke down under the strain of waiting for rain. It was really the two women who caused the death of the little girls. Each night they started a weird, high-pitched wailing that began on a low, mournful note and whipped up to a frenzy. Then they would stamp their feet and shout as though they had lost their heads. The men sat quiet and self-controlled; it was important for men to maintain their self-control at all times but their nerve was breaking too. They knew the women were haunted by the starvation of the coming year.

Finally, an ancient memory stirred in the old man, Mokgobja. When he was very young and the customs of the ancestors still ruled the land, he had been witness to a rain-making ceremony. And he came alive a little, struggling to recall the details which had been buried by years and years of prayer in a Christian church. As soon as the mists cleared a little, he began consulting in whispers with his youngest son, Ramadi. There was, he said, a certain rain god who accepted only the sacrifice of the bodies of children. Then the rain would fall; then the crops would grow, he said. He explained the ritual and as he talked, his memory became a conviction and he began to talk with unshakable authority. Ramadi's nerves were smashed by the nightly wailing of the women and soon the two men began whispering with the two women. The children continued their

game: 'You stupid thing! How could you have lost the money on the way to the shop! You must have been playing again!'

After it was all over and the bodies of the two little girls had been spread across the land, the rain did not fall. Instead, there was a deathly silence at night and the devouring heat of the sun by day. A terror, extreme and deep, overwhelmed the whole family. They packed, rolling up their skin blankets and pots, and fled back to the village.

People in the village soon noted the absence of the two little girls. They had died at the lands and were buried there, the family said. But people noted their ashen, terror-stricken faces and a murmur arose. What had killed the children, they wanted to know? And the family replied that they had just died. And people said amongst themselves that it was strange that the two deaths had occurred at the same time. And there was a feeling of great unease at the unnatural looks of the family. Soon the police came around. The family told them the same story of death and burial at the lands. They did not know what the children had died of. So the police asked to see the graves. At this, the mother of the children broke down and told everything.

Throughout that terrible summer the story of the children hung like a dark cloud of sorrow over the village, and the sorrow was not assuaged when the old man and Ramadi were sentenced to death for ritual murder. All they had on the statute books was that ritual murder was against the law and must be stamped out with the death penalty. The subtle story of strain and starvation and breakdown was inadmissible evidence at court; but all the people who lived off crops knew in their hearts that only a hair's breadth had saved them from sharing a fate similar to that of the Mokgobja family. They could have killed something to make the rain fall.

1977

Endnotes

- Note 1: Term for *wilderness* or *backwoods*.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A type of healer treating illnesses caused by witchcraft, and not witches themselves. “Charlatans”: someone claiming to have a skill they do not possess, a fraud. “Incanters”: spell-casters.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A public meeting or council.[Return to reference 3](#)

BEN OKRI

Ben Okri (b. 1959) spent his early years in England, where he attended primary school while his father pursued a law degree. His family returned to Nigeria in 1968 in the midst of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), a conflict that pitted ethnic groups against one another and generated disputes over the control of oil production in the Niger Delta. Okri's memories of this period inspired the Booker Prize-winning *The Famished Road* (1991), *Songs of Enchantment* (1993), and *Infinite Riches* (1998), a trilogy of novels centered on a spirit-child who moves between the mystical and earthly realms of modern Nigeria. Okri, the author of over two dozen novels, short story collections, and books of poetry, rejects the characterization of his work as magical realism as an unhelpful shorthand. Like his compatriot Wole Soyinka, he draws on a mix of African and European philosophies as well as myth and animism to portray reality as more multidimensional than a secular imagination of the world would allow.

Although Okri's novels tend to feature more fantastic elements than his short stories, his spiritual realism is on display in "What the Tapster Saw," from his collection *Stars of the New Curfew* (1988). The story features a tapster, a man who taps palm trees for sap used in the making of palm wine. The profession, several centuries old, connects the protagonist to a local trade, but his world is turned upside down when he falls from a tree on the newly demarcated property of the Delta Oil Company (a substitute for the British multinational corporation Shell, which dominated the Niger Delta region). The tapster proceeds to have nightmarish visions of a world poisoned by oil; images of deformed animals take the place of known birds; smoke from dynamite used for drilling obscures the tapster's sight and creates a burning sensation in his eyes and nose. Okri weaves obvious, subtle, and hallucinatory markers of oil's destructive effects throughout the story—none more surreal than the

rainbow-colored snake slithering from a borehole into the water in an animated recreation of an oil spill. "What the Tapster Saw" blurs the line between dreams and death to bring an otherworldly dimension to environmental crisis.

What the Tapster Saw

There was once an excellent tapster¹ who enjoyed climbing palm-trees as much as the tapping of their wines. One night he dreamt that while tapping for palm-wine he fell from the tree and died. He was so troubled by the dream that late as it was he went to visit his friend, Tabasco, who was a renowned herbalist. But that night Tabasco was too busy to pay much attention to what the tapster was saying. Harassed by the demands of his many wives, the herbalist kept chewing bundles of alligator pepper seeds² and dousing his mouth with palm-wine. When the tapster was about to leave the herbalist drew him aside and, with curious irrelevance, said:

'I used to know a hunter who, one day while hunting, saw a strange antelope. He followed the antelope till it came to an anthill. To his surprise the antelope turned into a woman and then disappeared. The hunter waited near the anthill for the woman to reappear. He fell asleep and when he woke up the ground was full of red water. He looked up and found himself surrounded by nine spirits. He went mad, of course. It took me three weeks to recover after I went inside his head to cure him. A little of his madness entered me. Tomorrow if you bring me three turtles and a big lobe of kola nut³ I will do something about your dream. But tonight I am very busy.'

The tapster agreed and, disappointed, went back home and drank his way through a gourd of palm-wine. He managed to forget his dream by the time he fell asleep.

In the morning he gathered his ropes and magic potions, tied three empty gourds to his bicycle, and rode out into the forest to begin his day's work. He had been riding for some time when he came to a signboard which read: DELTA OIL COMPANY: THIS AREA IS BEING DRILLED. TRESPASSERS IN DANGER. The tapster stared at the signboard without comprehension. Further along he noticed a

strange cluster of palm-trees. He rode through thick cobwebs in order to reach them. The smell of their red-green bark intoxicated him. He immediately tied his magic potions to one of the tree-trunks, brought out his rope, and proceeded to climb. Pressing his feet on both sides of the tree, switching the rope high up the rough rungs of the bark, he pulled himself up rapidly, till his chest began to ache. The morning sun, striking him with an oblique glare, blinded him. As the golden lights exploded in his eyes the branches of the palm-tree receded from him. It was the first time he had fallen in thirty years.

When he woke up he was surprised that he felt no pain. He even had the curious feeling that the fall had done him some good. He felt unbelievably light and airy. He walked through spangles of glittering cobwebs without the faintest idea of where he was going. Fireflies darted into his nose and ears and re-emerged from his eyes with their lights undimmed. He walked for a long time. Then he saw another signboard which read: DELTA OIL COMPANY: TRESPASSERS WILL BE PERSECUTED. Around him were earth-mounds, gravestones, a single palm-tree, and flickering mangrove roots. He made a mark on the tree-trunk. Suddenly it became a fully festered wound. As he passed the twisting roots, troubled by the whitish ichors⁴ of the wound, they clasped him round the ankles. They held him down and tickled him. When he began to laugh they let him go.

He came to a river, whose water was viscous and didn't seem to move. Near the river there was a borehole.⁵ Three turtles lazed on the edge of the borehole, watching him. One of the turtles had Tabasco's face. The tapster was about to say something when a multi-coloured snake emerged from the borehole and slithered past him. When the snake slid into the river the colour of the water changed, and it became transparent and luminous. The snake's skin burned with a roseate flame. While the tapster looked on a voice behind him said:

'Don't turn round.'

The tapster stayed still. The three turtles gazed at him with eyes of glass. Then the turtle that had Tabasco's face urinated in the tapster's direction. The turtle seemed to enjoy the act. The ecstasy

on its face made it look positively fiendish. The tapster laughed and a heavy object hit him on the head from behind. He turned round swiftly and saw nothing. He laughed again and was whacked even harder. He felt the substance of his being dissolve. The river seemed to heave during the long silence which followed.

'Where am I?' the tapster asked.

There was another silence. The snake, glittering, slid back out of the river. When the snake passed him it lifted its head and spat at him. The snake went on into the borehole, dazzling with the colours of the sun. The tapster began to tremble. After the trembling ceased a curious serenity spread through him. When he looked around he saw that he had multiplied. He was not sure whether it was his mind or his body which flowed in and out of him.

'Where am I?'

The voice did not answer. Then he heard footsteps moving away. He could not even sleep, for he heard other voices talking over him, talking about him, as if he were not there.

In that world the sun did not set, nor did it rise. It was a single unmoving eye. In the evenings the sun was like a large crystal. In the mornings it was incandescent. The tapster was never allowed to shut his eyes. After a day's wandering, when he lay by the borehole, hallucinating about palm-wine, a foul-smelling creature would come and stuff his eyes with cobwebs. This made his eyes itch and seemed a curious preparation for vision. When the tapster tried to sleep, with his eyes open, he saw the world he knew revolving in red lights. He saw women going to the distant marketplaces, followed by sounds which they didn't hear. He saw that the signboards of the world were getting bigger. He saw the employees of the oil company as they tried to level the forests. When he was hungry another creature, which he couldn't see, would come and feed him a mess of pulped chameleons, millepedes and bark. When he was thirsty the creature gave him a leaking calabash⁶ of green liquid. And then later at night another creature, which smelt of rotting agapanthus,⁷ crept above him, copulated with him, and left him the grotesque eggs of their nights together.

Then one day he dared to count the eggs. They were seven. He screamed. The river heaved. The snake stuck its head out from the borehole and the laughter of death roared from the sun. The laughter found him, crashed on him, shook him, and left large empty spaces in his head.

That night he fled. Everything fled with him. Then, after a while, he stopped. He abused the place, its terrible inhabitants, its unchanging landscape. Unable to escape, he cursed it ferociously. He was rewarded with several knocks. Then, as the eggs tormented him with the grating noises within them, as if a horrible birth were cranking away inside their monstrous shapes, he learned patience. He learned to watch the sky, and he saw that it wasn't so different from the skies of his drunkenness. He learned not to listen to the birth groaning within the eggs. He also learned that when he kept still everything else around him reflected his stillness.

And then, on another day, the voice came to him and said:

'Everything in your world has endless counterparts in other worlds. There is no shape, no madness, no ecstasy or revolution which does not have its shadow somewhere else. I could tell you stories which would drive you mad. You humans are so slow—you walk two thousand years behind yourselves.'

The voice was soon gone.

Another voice said to him:

'You have been dead for two days. Wake up.'

A creature came and stuffed his eyes with cobwebs. His eyes itched again and he saw that the wars were not yet over. Bombs which had not detonated for freak reasons, and which had lain hidden in farms, suddenly exploded. And some of those who lived as if the original war was over were blown up while they struggled with poverty. He saw the collapse of bridges that were being repaired. He saw roads that spanned wild tracts of forests and malarial swamps, creeks without names, hills without measurements. He saw the mouth of the roads lined with human skeletons, victims of mindless accidents. He saw dogs that followed people up and down the

bushpaths and brooding night-tracks. As soon as the dogs vanished they turned into ghommids⁸ that swallowed up lonely and unfortified travellers.

Then he saw the unsuccessful attempts to level the forest area and drill for oil. He saw the witch-doctors that had been brought in to drive away the spirits from the forest. They also tried to prevent the torrential rains from falling and attempted to delay the setting of the sun. When all this failed the company hired an expatriate who flew in with explosives left over from the last war. The tapster saw the expatriate plant dynamite round the forest area. After the explosion the tapster saw a thick pall of green smoke. When the smoke cleared the tapster watched a weird spewing up of oil and animal limbs from the ground. The site was eventually abandoned. Agapanthus grew there like blood on a battlefield.

The tapster saw people being shot in coups, in secret executions, in armed robberies. He noticed that those who died were felled by bullets which had their names on them. When his eyes stopped itching the tapster wandered beneath the copper bursts of the sky. He noticed that there were no birds around. Streamers of cobweb membranes weaved over the wounded palm tree.

And then one day, fired by memories of ancient heroes, he pursued a course into the borehole. In the strange environment he saw the multi-coloured snake twisted round a soapstone image. He saw alligators in a lake of bubbling green water. He saw an old man who had died in a sitting position while reading a bible upside-down. Everything seemed on fire, but there was no smoke. Thick slimes of oil seeped down the walls. Roseate flames burned everywhere without consuming anything. He heard a noise behind him. He turned and a creature forced a plate containing a messy substance of food into his hands. The creature then indicated that he should eat. The multi-coloured snake uncoiled itself from the soapstone image. While the tapster ate the snake slid over and began to tell him bad jokes. The snake told him stories of how they hang black men in quiet western towns across the great seas, and of how it was

possible to strip the skin off a baby without it uttering a sound. The snake laughed. Partly because the snake looked so ridiculous, the tapster laughed as well. Several sharp whacks, as from a steel edge, drummed on his head, and put him out for what could have been aeons of time.

When he recovered he traced his way out of the place. As he passed the man who had died reading the bible upside-down he saw that the man looked exactly like him. He fled from the borehole.

His impatience reached new proportions. He counted the rocks on the ground. He counted the cobwebs, the colours of the sun, the heavings of the river. He counted the number of times the wind blew. He told himself stories. But he found that whatever he told himself that was subversive was simultaneously censored by the knocks. He counted the knocks. He grew used to them.

Then the voice came to him again. It sounded more brutal than usual. The voice said:

‘Do you like it here?’

‘No.’

The tapster waited for a knock. It didn’t arrive.

‘Do you want to leave?’

‘Yes.’

‘What’s stopping you?’

‘I don’t know how.’

The voice was silent.

Another voice said:

‘You have been dead for three days.’

The tapster, who had seen the sky and earth from many angles, who knew the secrets of wine, had learned the most important lesson. He listened without thinking.

‘If you want to leave,’ the voice said, ‘we will have to beat you out.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you humans only understand pain.’

‘We don’t.’

There was another pause. He waited for a knock. It came. His thoughts floated around like cobwebs on the wind. The tapster stayed like that, still, through the purple phases of the sun. After a long while the voice said:

'Here are some thoughts to replace the ones that have been knocked away. Do you want to hear them?'

'Yes.'

The voice coughed and began:

'Even the good things in life eventually poison you. There are three kinds of sounds, two kinds of shadows, one gourd for every cracked head, and seven boreholes for those that climb too high. There is an acid in the feel of things. There is a fire which does not burn, but which dissolves the flesh like common salt. The bigger mouth eats the smaller head. The wind blows back to us what we have blown away. There are several ways to burn in your own fire. There is a particular sound which indicates trouble is coming. And your thoughts are merely the footsteps of you tramping round the disaster area of your own mind.'

'Thank you,' the tapster said.

The voice left. The tapster fell asleep.

When he woke up he saw the three turtles lazing again at the edge of the borehole. The turtle with Tabasco's face had on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and a stethoscope round his neck. The turtles broke a kola nut, divided it amongst themselves, and discussed gravely like scholars without a text. The multi-coloured snake came out of the borehole and made for the river. It paused when it neared the turtles. The tapster was fascinated by its opal eyes.

'There are six moons tonight,' said the turtle with Tabasco's face.

'Yes, there are six moons tonight,' agreed the other turtles.

The snake, lifting up its head, its eyes glittering at the firmament, said:

'There are seven moons tonight.'

The turtles were silent. The snake moved on towards the river. The turtle with Tabasco's face picked up a little rock and threw it at the snake. The other turtles laughed.

'There are no snakes tonight,' said the turtle with Tabasco's face.

As if it were a cue, the other turtles set upon the snake. Tabasco the turtle grabbed it by the neck and began to strangle it with the stethoscope. The other turtles beat its head with rocks. The snake lashed out with its tail. Tabasco and the snake rolled over and fell into the borehole. Noises were heard below. After a while Tabasco the turtle emerged without his glasses and stethoscope. He took up his place amongst the others. They broke another kola nut. Then Tabasco the turtle began to prepare a pipe. Instead of tobacco, he used alligator pepper seeds. He lit the pipe and motioned to the tapster to come closer. The tapster went and sat amongst the turtles on the edge of the borehole. Tabasco the turtle blew black ticklish smoke into the tapster's face and said:

'You have been dead for six days.'

The tapster didn't understand. The turtles gravely resumed their discussions on the numbers of heavenly bodies in the sky.

After some time the smoke had the effect of making the tapster float into a familiar world. A tickling sensation began in his nose. He floated to a moment in his childhood, when his mother carried him on her back on the day of the Masquerades.⁹ It was a hot day. The Masquerades thundered past, bellowing plumes of red smoke everywhere so that ordinary mortals would be confused about their awesome ritual aspects. All through that day his nose was on fire. And that night he dreamt that all sorts of mythical figures competed as to who could keep his nose on his face. He re-lived the dream. The mythical figures included the famous blacksmith, who could turn water into metal; the notorious tortoise, with his simple madness for complex situations; and the witch-doctors,¹ who did not have the key to mysteries. As they competed his mother came along, drove them away by scattering a plate full of ground hot pepper, worsening the problem of his nose.

And while the tapster floated in that familiar world the voice came and bore down on him. Another voice said:

'It's getting too late. Wake up.'

Invisible knocks fell on him. It was the most unusual moment of the sun, when it changed from purple to the darkness of the inward eye. After the knocks had stopped the tapster relieved himself of the mighty sneeze which had been gathering. When he sneezed the monstrous eggs exploded, the snake lost its opal eyes, and the voice fissioned into the sounds of several mosquitoes dying for a conversation. Green liquids spewed out from the borehole and blew away the snake, the signboard, and the turtles. When the tapster recovered from the upheaval he looked around. A blue cloud passed before his eyes. Tabasco the herbalist stood over him waving a crude censer,² from which issued the most irritating smoke. As soon as their eyes met, Tabasco gave a cry of joy and went to pour a libation on the soapstone image of his shrine. The image had two green glass eyes. At the foot of the shrine there were two turtles in a green basin.

'Where am I?' asked the tapster.

'I'm sorry I didn't pay attention to your dream in the first place,' said the herbalist.

'But where am I?'

'You fell from a palm-tree and you have been dead for seven days. We were going to bury you in the morning. I have been trying to reach you all this time. I won't charge you for my services; in fact I'd rather pay you, because all these years as a herbalist I have never had a more interesting case, nor a better conversation.'

1988

Endnotes

- Note 1: Someone who taps palm trees for the sap inside to be fermented into an alcoholic beverage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: West African spice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Fruit of the kola tree, native to west Africa.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Discharge from a wound.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A narrow hole in the ground, like those made to find oil.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A type of gourd.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A flower native to southern Africa with medicinal properties.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Supernatural creatures drawn from Yoruba mythology; the word was coined by Wole Soyinka in his 1968 translation of the Yoruba-language novel *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons —A Hunter's Saga* by D. O. Fagunwa.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Beings that bridge the human and spirit world. Masked dancers embody these spirits. Masquerades are thought to appear at traditional celebrations, festivals, and funerals, and are evidence of Indigenous religious practices, which colonial officials tried to suppress.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A type of healer treating illnesses caused by witchcraft, and not witches themselves. "Famous blacksmith": possibly Ogun, the Yoruba god of blacksmithing and metalwork. "Notorious tortoise": possibly Mbeku or Ijapa, both trickster figures in Yoruba folktales.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A container for burning incense.[Return to reference 2](#)

ARUNDHATI ROY

Arundhati Roy was born in northern India in 1961. Her father was a tea plantation manager, and her mother, a native of the southern state of Kerala, worked on behalf of women's rights. While Roy was still a child, her parents divorced and she moved with her mother to Kerala, where she lived until the age of sixteen and would set her Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997). Kerala is renowned for its biodiverse backwaters, a network of rivers, lakes, and wetlands that brings fresh water into contact with salt water from the Arabian Sea. In the 1980s, the state identified tourism as a growth industry and launched a successful campaign to brand the backwaters region "God's Own Country."

In the excerpt from *The God of Small Things* included here, the novel's protagonist, Rahel, returns to her hometown of Ayemenem in the wake of the tourism boom to witness its transformation from a small fishing village to an environmental attraction dominated by the luxurious "Heritage" hotel. While the new Ayemenem may draw numerous visitors, the narrative calls attention to the costly effects of industrialized tourism and agriculture upon the environment and upon the livelihoods of local artists. The juxtaposition of Rahel's childhood memories with the present day also invites readers to consider the relationship between Kerala's colonial past under British rule and its present state of economic dependence on international visitors and global hotel conglomerates. Roy's storytelling relies on the beauty and power of physical description, which she uses to connect the most vulnerable members of the human and nonhuman world to the larger social and economic forces threatening their existence. This hallmark of her style is on vivid display in *The God of Small Things*, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), and her prolific nonfiction on behalf of environmental justice causes.

From The God of Small Things

God's Own Country¹

Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed.

Both things had happened.

It had shrunk. And she had grown.

Downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer² lobby. The barrage regulated the inflow of salt water from the backwaters that opened into the Arabian Sea. So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river.

Despite the fact that it was June, and raining, the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water that lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish. It was choked with a succulent weed,³ whose furred brown roots waved like thin tentacles underwater. Bronze-winged lily-trotters walked across it. Splay-footed, cautious.

Once it had had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flowers.

The stone steps that had once led bathers right down to the water, and Fisher People to the fish, were entirely exposed and led from nowhere to nowhere, like an absurd corbelled⁴ monument that commemorated nothing. Ferns pushed through the cracks.

On the other side of the river, the steep mud banks changed abruptly into low mud walls of shanty hutments.⁵ Children hung their

bottoms over the edge and defecated directly onto the squelchy, sucking mud of the exposed riverbed. The smaller ones left their dribbling mustard streaks to find their own way down. Eventually, by evening, the river would rouse itself to accept the day's offerings and sludge off to the sea, leaving wavy lines of thick white scum in its wake. Upstream, clean mothers washed clothes and pots in unadulterated factory effluents. People bathed. Severed torsos soaping themselves, arranged like dark busts on a thin, rocking, ribbon lawn.

On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat.

Further inland, and still across, a five-star hotel chain had bought the Heart of Darkness.⁶

The History House (where map-breath'd ancestors with tough toe-nails once whispered) could no longer be approached from the river. It had turned its back on Ayemenem.⁷ The hotel guests were ferried across the backwaters, straight from Cochin.⁸ They arrived by speedboat, opening up a V of foam on the water, leaving behind a rainbow film of gasoline.

The view from the hotel was beautiful, but here too the water was thick and toxic. *No Swimming* signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy. They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu's estate. There wasn't much they could do about the smell.

But they had a swimming pool for swimming. And fresh tandoori pomfret and crêpe suzette⁹ on their menu.

The trees were still green, the sky still blue, which counted for something. So they went ahead and plugged their smelly paradise—*God's Own Country* they called it in their brochures—because they knew, those clever Hotel People, that smelliness, like other peoples' poverty, was merely a matter of getting used to. A question of discipline. Of Rigor and Air-conditioning. Nothing more.

Kari Saipu's house had been renovated and painted. It had become the centerpiece of an elaborate complex, crisscrossed with artificial

canals and connecting bridges. Small boats bobbed in the water. The old colonial bungalow with its deep verandah and Doric columns,¹ was surrounded by smaller, older, wooden houses—ancestral homes—that the hotel chain had bought from old families and transplanted in the Heart of Darkness. Toy Histories for rich tourists to play in. Like the sheaves of rice in Joseph's dream, like a press of eager natives petitioning an English magistrate, the old houses had been arranged around the History House in attitudes of deference. "Heritage," the hotel was called.

The Hotel People liked to tell their guests that the oldest of the wooden houses, with its airtight, paneled storeroom which could hold enough rice to feed an army for a year, had been the ancestral home of Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, "Kerala's Mao Tse-tung,"² they explained to the uninitiated. The furniture and knick-knacks that came with the house were on display. A reed umbrella, a wicker couch. A wooden dowry box. They were labeled with edifying placards that said *Traditional Kerala Umbrella* and *Traditional Bridal Dowry-box*.

So there it was then, History and Literature enlisted by commerce. Kurtz and Karl Marx³ joining palms to greet rich guests as they stepped off the boat.

Comrade Namboodiripad's house functioned as the hotel's dining room, where semi-suntanned tourists in bathing suits sipped tender coconut water (served in the shell), and old Communists, who now worked as fawning bearers in colorful ethnic clothes, stooped slightly behind their trays of drinks.

In the evenings (for that Regional Flavor) the tourists were treated to truncated kathakali⁴ performances ("Small attention spans," the Hotel People explained to the dancers). So ancient stories were collapsed and amputated. Six-hour classics were slashed to twenty-minute cameos.

The performances were staged by the swimming pool. While the drummers drummed and the dancers danced, hotel guests frolicked with their children in the water. While Kunti revealed her secret to Karna on the riverbank,⁵ courting couples rubbed suntan oil on each

other. While fathers played sublimated sexual games with their nubile teenaged daughters, Poothana suckled young Krishna at her poisoned breast.⁶ Bhima disemboweled Dushasana and bathed Draupadi's hair in his blood.⁷

The back verandah of the History House (where a posse of Touchable policemen converged, where an inflatable goose was burst) had been enclosed and converted into the airy hotel kitchen. Nothing worse than kebabs and caramel custard happened there now. The Terror was past. Overcome by the smell of food. Silenced by the humming of cooks. The cheerful chop-chop-chopping of ginger and garlic. The disemboweling of lesser mammals—pigs, goats. The dicing of meat. The scaling of fish.

Something lay buried in the ground. Under grass. Under twenty-three years of June rain.

A small forgotten thing.

Nothing that the world would miss.

A child's plastic wristwatch with the time painted on it.

Ten to two, it said.

A band of children followed Rahel on her walk.

"Hello hippie," they said, twenty-five years too late.

"What is your name?"

Then someone threw a small stone at her, and her childhood fled, flailing its thin arms.

* * *

1997

Endnotes

- Note 1: Tourism slogan for Kerala, a state in southern India famous for its backwaters and beaches. [Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Rice farmers. "Barrage": a type of dam that can be opened and closed to control water flow.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Type of fleshy plant.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An architectural technique to carry weight made by jutting material, like a bracket.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A collection of huts.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A reference to the 1899 novella by Joseph Conrad (see p. 67 in this volume).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Village in Kerala, India.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: City in Kerala, India.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A French dessert crêpe served with an orange zest and liqueur sauce. "Tandoori pomfret": a fish dish.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Grecian style of plain, unadorned columns.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Chinese revolutionary leader (1893–1976) and founder of the People's Republic of China (a Communist state).
"Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad": Indian politician who belonged to the Communist Party.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: German philosopher and author of *The Communist Manifesto*. "Kurtz": reference to a major character in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. He descends into corruption and madness while living in Congo and is a symbol of the moral failure of the imperial project.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Type of classical Indian dance.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, Kunti gives birth to Karna out of wedlock and abandons him in a basket on the Ganges. Karna later finds that he is fighting against his half-siblings when he meets his mother later in life.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: In Hindu legend, Poothana, sent to kill the god Krishna, attempts to do so by breastfeeding him poisoned milk.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Also a tale of the *Mahabharata*. Dushasana is a villain who attempts to humiliate the noblewoman Draupadi by

removing her sari, and Bhima avenges her by slaying
Dushasana.[Return to reference 7](#)

AMITAV GHOSH

Amitav Ghosh was born in 1956 in Calcutta in the state of West Bengal in India. He studied at the Doon School and Delhi University and went on to receive a doctorate in social anthropology from Oxford. Ghosh is equally renowned for his novels and nonfiction, both of which blend meticulous historical research and ethnographic accounts with complex plotlines and fully realized characters. Ghosh's early novels, including *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004), establish his preoccupation with memory, cross-cultural encounters, and the effects of humanmade borders on the conception of more than human homelands. Scientists feature prominently in the latter two novels as Ghosh derives literary conflict from the intermingling of their professional expertise with diverse forms of cultural knowledge and belief. Ghosh's interests in cosmopolitanism and environmentalism are on full display in the *Ibis* trilogy, which contains *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015). Set in the 1830s in the Indian Ocean region and centered on a trading ship called the *Ibis*, these novels feature a diverse multilingual ensemble of migrant characters whose fates intersect in the lead-up to the Opium Wars between Britain and China.

The *Ibis* trilogy reveals in fictional form the impact of industrial development, free trade, and resource wars on the nineteenth-century world order. *The Great Derangement* (2016), an excerpt from which is included here, offers in nonfictional form an account of the representational challenges that climate change poses to twenty-first-century writers of literature. Ghosh provocatively argues that the dominant conventions shaping literary fiction over the past two centuries have rendered climate change invisible or outlandish. Spectacular and apocalyptic natural disasters have been the province of science fiction, a genre historically regarded as less respectable or

“serious” than literary realism and modernism. In turn, the cumulatively destructive effects of carbon emissions have been missing from canonical literary representations of everyday life. Ghosh calls upon writers to treat climate change as not only a problem of physical changes to Earth systems, but also a problem of perception that demands new strategies of literary representation.

From The Great Derangement

1

Who can forget those moments when something that seems inanimate turns out to be vitally, even dangerously alive? As, for example, when an arabesque¹ in the pattern of a carpet is revealed to be a dog's tail, which, if stepped upon, could lead to a nipped ankle? Or when we reach for an innocent looking vine and find it to be a worm or a snake? When a harmlessly drifting log turns out to be a crocodile?

It was a shock of this kind, I imagine, that the makers of *The Empire Strikes Back*² had in mind when they conceived of the scene in which Han Solo lands the Millennium Falcon on what he takes to be an asteroid—but only to discover that he has entered the gullet of a sleeping space monster.

To recall that memorable scene now, more than thirty-five years after the making of the film, is to recognize its impossibility. For if ever there were a Han Solo, in the near or distant future, his assumptions about interplanetary objects are certain to be very different from those that prevailed in California at the time when the film was made. The humans of the future will surely understand, knowing what they presumably will know about the history of their forebears on Earth, that only in one, very brief era, lasting less than three centuries, did a significant number of their kind believe that planets and asteroids are inert.

2

My ancestors were ecological refugees³ long before the term was invented.

They were from what is now Bangladesh,⁴ and their village was on the shore of the Padma River, one of the mightiest waterways in

the land. The story, as my father told it, was this: one day in the mid-1850s the great river suddenly changed course, drowning the village; only a few of the inhabitants had managed to escape to higher ground. It was this catastrophe that had unmoored our forebears; in its wake they began to move westward and did not stop until the year 1856, when they settled once again on the banks of a river, the Ganges, in Bihar.⁵

I first heard this story on a nostalgic family trip, as we were journeying down the Padma River in a steamboat. I was a child then, and as I looked into those swirling waters I imagined a great storm, with coconut palms bending over backward until their fronds lashed the ground; I envisioned women and children racing through howling winds as the waters rose behind them. I thought of my ancestors sitting huddled on an outcrop, looking on as their dwellings were washed away.

To this day, when I think of the circumstances that have shaped my life, I remember the elemental force that untethered my ancestors from their homeland and launched them on the series of journeys that preceded, and made possible, my own travels. When I look into my past the river seems to meet my eyes, staring back, as if to ask, Do you recognize me, wherever you are?

Recognition is famously a passage from ignorance to knowledge. To recognize, then, is not the same as an initial introduction. Nor does recognition require an exchange of words: more often than not we recognize mutely. And to recognize is by no means to understand that which meets the eye; comprehension need play no part in a moment of recognition.

The most important element of the word *recognition* thus lies in its first syllable, which harks back to something prior, an already existing awareness that makes possible the passage from ignorance to knowledge: a moment of recognition occurs when a prior awareness flashes before us, effecting an instant change in our understanding of that which is beheld. Yet this flash cannot appear spontaneously; it cannot disclose itself except in the presence of its lost other. The knowledge that results from recognition, then, is not

of the same kind as the discovery of something new: it arises rather from a renewed reckoning with a potentiality that lies within oneself.

This, I imagine, was what my forebears experienced on that day when the river rose up to claim their village: they awoke to the recognition of a presence that had molded their lives to the point where they had come to take it as much for granted as the air they breathed. But, of course, the air too can come to life with sudden and deadly violence—as it did in the Congo in 1988, when a great cloud of carbon dioxide burst forth from Lake Nyos⁶ and rolled into the surrounding villages, killing 1,700 people and an untold number of animals. But more often it does so with a quiet insistence—as the inhabitants of New Delhi and Beijing⁷ know all too well—when inflamed lungs and sinuses prove once again that there is no difference between the without and the within; between using and being used. These too are moments of recognition, in which it dawns on us that the energy that surrounds us, flowing under our feet and through wires in our walls, animating our vehicles and illuminating our rooms, is an all-encompassing presence that may have its own purposes about which we know nothing.

It was in this way that I too became aware of the urgent proximity of nonhuman presences, through instances of recognition that were forced upon me by my surroundings. I happened then to be writing about the Sundarbans, the great mangrove forest of the Bengal Delta,⁸ where the flow of water and silt is such that geological processes that usually unfold in deep time appear to occur at a speed where they can be followed from week to week and month to month. Overnight a stretch of riverbank will disappear, sometimes taking houses and people with it; but elsewhere a shallow mud bank will arise and within weeks the shore will have broadened by several feet. For the most part, these processes are of course cyclical. But even back then, in the first years of the twenty-first century, portents of accumulative and irreversible change could also be seen, in receding shorelines and a steady intrusion of salt water on lands that had previously been cultivated.

This is a landscape so dynamic that its very changeability leads to innumerable moments of recognition. I captured some of these in my notes from that time, as, for example, in these lines, written in May 2002: "I do believe it to be true that the land here is demonstrably alive; that it does not exist solely, or even incidentally, as a stage for the enactment of human history; that it is [itself] a protagonist." Elsewhere, in another note, I wrote, "Here even a child will begin a story about his grandmother with the words: 'in those days the river wasn't here and the village was not where it is . . .'"

Yet, I would not be able to speak of these encounters as instances of recognition if some prior awareness of what I was witnessing had not already been implanted in me, perhaps by childhood experiences, like that of going to look for my family's ancestral village; or by memories like that of a cyclone, in Dhaka,⁹ when a small fishpond, behind our walls, suddenly turned into a lake and came rushing into our house; or by my grandmother's stories of growing up beside a mighty river; or simply by the insistence with which the landscape of Bengal forces itself on the artists, writers, and filmmakers of the region.

But when it came to translating these perceptions into the medium of my imaginative life—into fiction, that is—I found myself confronting challenges of a wholly different order from those that I had dealt with in my earlier work. Back then, those challenges seemed to be particular to the book I was then writing, *The Hungry Tide*,¹ but now, many years later, at a moment when the accelerating impacts of global warming have begun to threaten the very existence of low-lying areas like the Sundarbans, it seems to me that those problems have far wider implications. I have come to recognize that the challenges that climate change poses for the contemporary writer, although specific in some respects, are also products of something broader and older; that they derive ultimately from the grid of literary forms and conventions that came to shape the narrative imagination in precisely that period when the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere was rewriting the destiny of the Earth.

3

That climate change casts a much smaller shadow within the landscape of literary fiction than it does even in the public arena is not hard to establish. To see that this is so, we need only glance through the pages of a few highly regarded literary journals and book reviews, for example, the *London Review of Books*, the *New York Review of Books*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, the *Literary Journal*, and the *New York Times Review of Books*. When the subject of climate change occurs in these publications, it is almost always in relation to nonfiction; novels and short stories are very rarely to be glimpsed within this horizon. Indeed, it could even be said that fiction that deals with climate change is almost by definition not of the kind that is taken seriously by serious literary journals: the mere mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction. It is as though in the literary imagination climate change were somehow akin to extraterrestrials or interplanetary travel.

There is something confounding about this peculiar feedback loop. It is very difficult, surely, to imagine a conception of seriousness that is blind to potentially life-changing threats. And if the urgency of a subject were indeed a criterion of its seriousness, then, considering what climate change actually portends for the future of the Earth, it should surely follow that this would be the principal preoccupation of writers the world over—and this, I think, is very far from being the case.

But why? Are the currents of global warming too wild to be navigated in the accustomed barques of narration? But the truth, as is now widely acknowledged, is that we have entered a time when the wild has become the norm: if certain literary forms are unable to negotiate these torrents, then they will have failed—and their failures will have to be counted as an aspect of the broader imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis.

Clearly the problem does not arise out of a lack of information: there are surely very few writers today who are oblivious to the

current disturbances in climate systems the world over. Yet, it is a striking fact that when novelists do choose to write about climate change it is almost always outside of fiction. A case in point is the work of Arundhati Roy:² not only is she one of the finest prose stylists of our time, she is passionate and deeply informed about climate change. Yet all her writings on these subjects are in various forms of nonfiction.

Or consider the even more striking case of Paul Kingsnorth,³ author of *The Wake*, a much-admired historical novel set in eleventh-century England. Kingsnorth dedicated several years of his life to climate change activism before founding the influential Dark Mountain Project, “a network of writers, artists and thinkers who have stopped believing the stories our civilization tells itself.” Although Kingsnorth has written a powerful nonfiction account of global resistance movements, as of the time of writing he has yet to publish a novel in which climate change plays a major part.

I too have been preoccupied with climate change for a long time, but it is true of my own work as well, that this subject figures only obliquely in my fiction. In thinking about the mismatch between my personal concerns and the content of my published work, I have come to be convinced that the discrepancy is not the result of personal predilections: it arises out of the peculiar forms of resistance that climate change presents to what is now regarded as serious fiction.

4

In his seminal essay “The Climate of History,” Dipesh Chakrabarty⁴ observes that historians will have to revise many of their fundamental assumptions and procedures in this era of the Anthropocene, in which “humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth.” I would go further and add that the Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities, but also to our commonsense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general.

There can be no doubt, of course, that this challenge arises in part from the complexities of the technical language that serves as our primary window on climate change. But neither can there be any doubt that the challenge derives also from the practices and assumptions that guide the arts and humanities. To identify how this happens is, I think, a task of the utmost urgency: it may well be the key to understanding why contemporary culture finds it so hard to deal with climate change. Indeed, this is perhaps the most important question ever to confront *culture* in the broadest sense—for let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.

Culture generates desires—for vehicles and appliances, for certain kinds of gardens and dwellings—that are among the principal drivers of the carbon economy. A speedy convertible excites us neither because of any love for metal and chrome, nor because of an abstract understanding of its engineering. It excites us because it evokes an image of a road arrowing through a pristine landscape; we think of freedom and the wind in our hair; we envision James Dean and Peter Fonda⁵ racing toward the horizon; we think also of Jack Kerouac and Vladimir Nabokov.⁶ When we see an advertisement that links a picture of a tropical island to the word *paradise*, the longings that are kindled in us have a chain of transmission that stretches back to Daniel Defoe and Jean-Jacques Rousseau:⁷ the flight that will transport us to the island is merely an ember in that fire. When we see a green lawn that has been watered with desalinated water, in Abu Dhabi⁸ or Southern California or some other environment where people had once been content to spend their water thriftily in nurturing a single vine or shrub, we are looking at an expression of a yearning that may have been midwived by the novels of Jane Austen.⁹ The artifacts and commodities that are conjured up by these desires are, in a sense, at once expressions and concealments of the cultural matrix that brought them into being.

This culture is, of course, intimately linked with the wider histories of imperialism and capitalism that have shaped the world.

But to know this is still to know very little about the specific ways in which the matrix interacts with different modes of cultural activity: poetry, art, architecture, theater, prose fiction, and so on.

Throughout history these branches of culture have responded to war, ecological calamity, and crises of many sorts: why, then, should climate change prove so peculiarly resistant to their practices?

From this perspective, the questions that confront writers and artists today are not just those of the politics of the carbon economy; many of them have to do also with our own practices and the ways in which they make us complicit in the concealments of the broader culture. For instance: if contemporary trends in architecture, even in this period of accelerating carbon emissions, favor shiny, glass-and-metal-plated towers, do we not have to ask, What are the patterns of desire that are fed by these gestures? If I, as a novelist, choose to use brand names as elements in the depiction of character, do I not need to ask myself about the degree to which this makes me complicit in the manipulations of the marketplace?

In the same spirit, I think it also needs to be asked, What is it about climate change that the mention of it should lead to banishment from the preserves of serious fiction? And what does this tell us about culture writ large and its patterns of evasion?

In a substantially altered world, when sea-level rise has swallowed the Sundarbans and made cities like Kolkata, New York, and Bangkok¹ uninhabitable, when readers and museumgoers turn to the art and literature of our time, will they not look, first and most urgently, for traces and portents of the altered world of their inheritance? And when they fail to find them, what should they—what can they—do other than to conclude that ours was a time when most forms of art and literature were drawn into the modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight? Quite possibly, then, this era, which so congratulates itself on its self-awareness, will come to be known as the time of the Great Derangement.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Type of decoration or ornamental pattern characterized by intricate lines and patterns.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The fifth episode of the Star Wars film franchise (1980).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: People who must leave their homes due to the effects of climate change.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Country in South Asia.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: State in eastern India.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Lake in the African country Cameroon. "Congo": country in Central Africa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Capital of China. "New Delhi": capital of India.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: World's largest river delta, where the Brahmaputra and Ganges Rivers, among others, drain into the Bay of Bengal.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Capital of Bangladesh.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Published 2004.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Indian author also in this section (b. 1961).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: English author (b. 1972).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Indian historian (b. 1948).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: American actors. Fonda (1940–2019) starred in *Easy Rider* (1969), considered a quintessential American road film. Dean (1931–1955) starred in films including *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and also raced cars.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Russian American novelist (1899–1977), author of *Lolita* (1955), in part a foreigner's story of traveling across the United States. "Jack Kerouac": American novelist (1922–1969), author of *On the Road* (1957).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: French philosopher and writer (1712–1778). "Daniel Defoe": English writer (1660–1731).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Capital of the United Arab Emirates.[Return to reference 8](#)

- Note 9: English novelist (1775–1817).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Capital of Thailand. “Kolkata”: city in India.[Return to reference 1](#)

ROBERT MACFARLANE

Born in 1976 in the village of Halam, Nottinghamshire, in England, Robert Macfarlane studied at the University of Cambridge, where he now teaches. Macfarlane is a distinguished nature writer whose nonfiction blends literary allusion, essayistic meditations, and novelistic plotlines in which individuals, like characters, experience revelations through their encounters with places. His early books, *Mountains of the Mind* (2003) and *The Wild Places* (2007), engage and challenge traditions of nature writing that align mountains with majesty and wilderness with empty spaces devoid of human intervention. Macfarlane approaches wildness as a “state of mind” rather than a feature of the land. His commitment to restoring human history and psychology to sites of geological and ecological wonder characterizes the skepticism of contemporary nature writing toward pristine notions of “Nature” with a capital N.

In his award-winning *Underland* (2019), Macfarlane uses the mythic motif of the underworld to connect the depths beneath the Earth’s surface to the limits of human imagination and fortitude in the face of irreversible changes to the climate. Traversing caves beneath the Mendip Hills in England, underground nuclear waste facilities in New Mexico, and tunnels beneath the melting ice caps of Greenland, Macfarlane contemplates the paradox of human agency in the face of geological time. On the one hand, human beings have irrevocably changed the Earth’s atmosphere and will leave the signature of our species in the strata of the Earth. On the other hand, humans are merely a blip in the deep time of our planet whose rock formations inscribe billions of years. In the excerpt included here, Macfarlane goes beneath Epping Forest in the northeast of London to explore the symbiotic networks between trees and fungus. Turning from megaflora to mushrooms draws human attention to the aesthetically unremarkable forms of life that enable our existence. Macfarlane takes the urban forest as a site of

contradictions that leads its visitors to reappraise their own notions of preservation and extinction.

From UNDERLAND

The Understorey

(Epping Forest, London)¹

Occasionally—once or twice in a lifetime if you are lucky—you encounter an idea so powerful in its implications that it unsettles the ground you walk on.

The first time I heard anyone speak of the ‘wood wide web,’ more than a decade ago now, I was trying not to cry. A beloved friend was dying too young and too quickly. I had gone to see him for what I took to be the last time. He was tired by pain and drugs. We sat together, talked. My friend was a woodsman. Trees grew through his life and thought. His grandfather’s surname was Wood, he lived in a timber-framed house that he had built himself, and he had planted thousands of trees by hand over the years. ‘I have sap in my veins,’ he wrote once.

That day I read aloud a poem that was important to us both, ‘Birches’ by Robert Frost,² in which climbing the snow-white trunks of birches becomes both a readying for death and a declaration of life. Then he told me about new research he had recently read concerning the interrelations of trees: how, when one of their number was sickening or under stress, they could share nutrients by means of an underground system that conjoined their roots beneath the soil, thereby sometimes nursing the sick tree back to health. It was a measure of my friend’s generosity of spirit that—so close to death himself—he could speak unjealously of this phenomenon of healing.

He did not have the strength then to tell me the details of how this below-ground sharing operated—how tree might invisibly reach out to tree within the soil. But I could not forget the image of that mysterious buried network, joining single trees into forest

communities. It was planted in my mind, and there took root. Over the years I would encounter other mentions of the same extraordinary idea, and gradually these isolated fragments began to connect together into something like understanding.

* * *

Merlin Sheldrake, as the oldest joke in mycology goes, is a fun guy to be around. During the days in which he conjures open the underland of Epping Forest for me, I ask more questions than I have of anyone for what feels like years. What he tells and shows me in that modest peri-urban forest reshapes my sense of the world in ways I am still processing.

* * *

'My childhood superheroes weren't Marvel characters,'³ Merlin once said to me, 'they were lichens and fungi. Fungi and lichen annihilate our categories of gender. They reshape our ideas of community and cooperation. They screw up our hereditary model of evolutionary descent. They utterly *liquidate* our notions of time. Lichens can crumble rocks into dust with terrifying acids. Fungi can exude massively powerful enzymes *outside* their bodies that dissolve soil. They're the biggest organisms in the world and among the oldest. They're world-makers and world-breakers. What's more superhero than *that*?'

Merlin and I set off on foot into Epping Forest one morning from a high clearing, heading roughly north, keeping the sun to the right of our line.

Epping extends to the north-east of London, and it is very far from a wildwood. It was first designated as a royal hunting forest in the twelfth century by Henry II,⁴ with penalties for poaching that included imprisonment and mutilation. Presently it is managed by the City of London Corporation, and has more than fifty bye-laws

governing behaviour within its bounds—though the punishments are now fiscal rather than corporal. It is fully contained within the M25, the orbital motorway that encircles outer London. Minor roads traverse it, and it is never more than two and a half miles wide. Despite its small extent, Epping is easy to get lost in—a forest of forking paths to which, for a thousand years, the people of London and its surrounds have gone for shelter, sex, escape and a relic greenwood magic.

Growl of roads. Whirr of a low-flying bumblebee, stirring the leaf litter with its downdraught. Buzzard overhead, turning, mewing. Old coppice trees left uncut, hydra-headed pollards. A fallen log, thick with moss; small orange fungi sprouting from wet breaks in its grain. Where trees thin out and light falls, hundreds of green beech seedlings are pushing up through the litter, none more than an inch high. Five fallow deer appear between hollies ahead of us, the dapple of leaf-light flicking off the dapple of their flanks as they move through the understorey.

In the language of forestry and forest ecology, the 'understorey' is the name given to the life that exists between the forest floor and the tree canopy: the fungi, mosses, lichens, bushes and saplings that thrive and compete in this mid-zone. Metaphorically, though, the 'understorey' is also the sum of the entangled, ever-growing narratives, histories, ideas and words that interweave to give a wood or forest its diverse life in culture.

'What interests me most,' says Merlin, 'is the understorey's understory.' He points around at the beech, the hornbeam, the chestnut. 'All of these trees and bushes,' he says, 'are connected with one another below ground in ways we not only cannot see, but ways we have scarcely begun to understand.'

* * *

Merlin was taught as an undergraduate by Oliver Rackham,⁵ the legendary botanist whose research transformed our understanding of both the cultural and botanical history of the English landscape.

Working with Rackham, Merlin found himself most intellectually attracted to places where orthodox evolutionary theory felt thinnest—and for him the thinnest places were where mutualisms were at work. Mutualism is a subset of symbiosis in which there exists between organisms a prolonged relationship that is interdependent and reciprocally beneficial.

‘What fascinates me about mutualisms,’ says Merlin, ‘is that one would predict from basic evolutionary theory that they would be massively unstable, and collapse quickly into parasitism. But it turns out that there are very ancient mutualisms, which have remained stable for puzzlingly long times: between the yucca plant and yucca moths, for example, or of course between the bacteria that illuminate the bioluminescent headlamp of the bobtail squid, and the squid itself.’

‘Of course,’ I reply. ‘The ancient glowing-bobtail-squid-and-bacteria mutualism.’

‘The ultimate mutualism, though,’ says Merlin, ‘is between plants and mycorrhizal fungi.’

* * *

Merlin and I have been walking the forest for two hours or so when we reach one of Epping’s great pollard beech groves. Pollarding—the pruning of the upper branches of a tree to promote dense growth—keeps trees alive for longer, indeed can enter them into an almost indefinite fairy-tale time of longevity. Here in the grove, long waving trunks yearn up to the sun. Through their leaves falls a green sub-sea light. It feels as if we are swimming through a kelp forest.

We stop and lie down for a while on the woodland floor, on our backs, not speaking, watching the trees’ gentle movements in the breeze, and the light lacing and lancing from fifty feet or more above us. Where the pollards spread out to form the canopies, I realize I can trace patterns of space running along the edges of each tree’s canopy: the beautiful phenomenon known as ‘crown shyness’, whereby individual forest trees respect each other’s space, leaving

slender running gaps between the end of one tree's outermost leaves and the start of another's.

Lying there among the trees, despite a learned wariness towards anthropomorphism, I find it hard not to imagine these arboreal relations in terms of tenderness, generosity and even love: the respectful distance of their shy crowns, the kissing branches that have pleached with one another, the unseen connections forged by root and hyphae between seemingly distant trees. I remember something Louis de Bernières⁶ has written about a relationship that endured into old age: 'we had roots that grew towards each other underground, and when all the pretty blossom had fallen from our branches we found that we were one tree and not two.' As someone lucky to live in a long love, I recognize that gradual growing-towards and subterranean intertwining; the things that do not need to be said between us, the unspoken communication which can sometimes tilt troublingly towards silence, and the sharing of both happiness and pain. I think of good love as something that roots, not rots, over time, and of the hyphae that are weaving through the ground below me, reaching out through the soil in search of mergings. Theirs, too, seems to me then a version of love's work.

Merlin gets up, walks towards the centre of the grove as if looking for something, then bends down and brushes away leaf litter and beech mast,⁷ to clear a patch of soil the size of a saucer. I get up and follow him. He pinches some of the earth and rubs it between his fingers. It smears rather than crumbling: a rich, dark humus,⁸ made of composted leaves.

'This is our problem when it comes to studying the fungal network,' he says. 'Soil is fantastically impenetrable to experiments, and the fungal hyphae are on the whole too thin to see with the naked eye. That's the main reason it's taken us so long to work out the wood wide web's existence, and to discern what it's doing.'

Rivers of sap flow in the trees around us. If we were right now to lay a stethoscope to the bark of a birch or beech, we would hear the sap bubbling and crackling as it moves through the trunk.

'You can put rhizotrons⁹ into the ground to look at root growth,' Merlin says, 'but those don't really give you the fungi because they're too fine. You can do below-ground laser scanning but, again, that's too crude for the fungal networks.'

I am reminded once more of how resistant the underland remains to our usual forms of seeing; how it still hides so much from us, even in our age of hyper-visibility and ultra-scrutiny. Just a few inches of soil is enough to keep startling secrets, hold astonishing cargo: an eighth of the world's total biomass comprises bacteria that live below ground, and a further quarter is of fungal origin.

'We know the network is there,' Merlin says, 'but it's so effortful to track it. So we have to look for clues to the labyrinth—find clever means of following its paths.'

I kneel beside him. I can see dozens of insects just in this small area, the names of most of which I do not know: gleaming spiders and red-bronze beetles battling over the leaves, a woodlouse curled up into a sphere, a green threadworm writhing through the humus.

'It's *roiling* with life,' I say to Merlin.

'That's just the visible life. Hyphae will be growing into the decomposing matter of this half-rotting leaf,' says Merlin, 'into those rotting logs and those rotting twigs, and then you'll have the mycorrhizal fungi whose hyphae grow into hot spots—all of them frothing and tangling and fusing, making a network that's connecting holly to holly but also to this beech, and to a seedling of something else over there, layering and layering and *layering*—until, well, it blows your computational brain!'

As Merlin speaks I feel a quick, eerie sense of the world shifting irreversibly around me. Ground shivering beneath feet, knees, skin. *If only your mind were a slightly greener thing, we'd drown you in meaning . . .* I glance down, try to trance the soil into transparency such that I can see its hidden infrastructure: millions of fungal skeins suspended between tapering tree roots, their prolific liaisons creating a gossamer web at least as intricate as the cables and fibres that hang beneath our cities. What's the haunting phrase I've heard used to describe the realm of fungi? *The kingdom of the grey.* It

speaks of fungi's utter otherness—the challenges they issue to our usual models of time, space and species.

'You look at the network,' says Merlin, 'and then it starts to look back at you.'

* * *

Potawatomi, a Native American language of the Great Plains region, includes the word *puhpowee*, which might be translated as 'the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight'. In 'all its technical vocabulary', Robin Wall Kimmerer notes, 'Western science has no such term, no words to hold this mystery.'

Kimmerer herself is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. A speaker of what she calls 'fluent botany', she is careful to distinguish this from what she refers to as 'the language of plants'—that is to say, the language that plants speak, as opposed to the language that is used to speak of plants. Kimmerer does not disdain the precisions of botanical lexis,¹ which 'polishes the gift of seeing', but she finds it also to be of necessity a lexis of objectification and distancing, with something missing beneath its finely faceted surface. That missing something is predominantly the acknowledgement of life in the more-than-human world, an indifference which is grained into language not just at the level of individual words, but at the deeper-down levels of grammar and syntax.

In Potawatomi, by contrast, almost all words declare the animacy or inanimacy of that to which they refer. The language is predisposed to recognize life in otherness, and also to extend the reach of that category of 'life' far beyond its familiar limits in Western thought. In Potawatomi, not only humans, animals and trees are alive, but so too are mountains, boulders, winds and fire. Stories, songs and rhythms are all also animate, they *are*, they *be*. Potawatomi is a language abundant with verbs: 70 per cent of its words are verbs, compared to 30 per cent in English. *Wiikwegamaa*,

for instance, means 'to be a bay'. 'A bay is a noun only if water is *dead*,' writes Kimmerer:

trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb . . . releases the water from bondage and lets it live. 'To be a bay' holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers.²

Like Kimmerer, I wish for a language that recognizes and advances the animacy of the world, 'the life that pulses through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms . . . well[ing] up all around us'. Like Kimmerer, I relish those aspects of discourse that extend being and sentience respectfully and flexibly beyond the usual bearers of such qualities. Like Kimmerer I believe that we need, now, a 'grammar of animacy'. A modern predisposition to regard animacy as anomaly runs through what the poet Jeremy Prynne³ once called 'mammal language', by which he means the language that is used by humans, encoding intent, agency and muscular power deep in its grammar.

The real underland of language is not the roots of single words, but rather the soil of grammar and syntax, where habits of speech and therefore also habits of thought settle and interact over long periods of time. Grammar and syntax exert powerful influence on the proceedings of language and its users. They shape the ways we relate to each other and to the living world. Words are world-makers—and language is one of the great geological forces of the Anthropocene.

Projects have recently been started around the world to gain even the most basic of vocabularies for the experiences of life and death in the Anthropocene. These stuttering attempts to speak what it is we are doing have generated ugly new terms for an ugly epoch: 'geotraumatics', 'planetary dysphoria', 'apex-guilt'. Such words feel like futile forms of nominalism, a hopelessly hyperactive pointing and

naming. They stick in the throat in two ways: they are difficult to utter and hard to swallow.

Only one of these recent coinages resonates with me: 'species loneliness', for the intense solitude that we are fashioning for ourselves as we strip the Earth of the other life with which we share it. If there is human meaning to be made of the wood wide web, it is surely that what might save us as we move forwards into the precarious, unsettled centuries ahead is collaboration: mutualism, symbiosis, the inclusive human work of collective decision-making extended to more-than-human communities.

You look at the network, and then it starts to look back at you ...

Writing of mycorrhizal fungi, Albrecht proposes that we rechristen the Anthropocene, naming it instead the Symbiocene—an epoch characterized in terms of social organization 'by human intelligence that replicates the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life-reproducing forms and processes found in living systems . . . such as the wood wide web.'

The word for world is forest.

2019

Endnotes

- Note 1: Ancient woodland between London and Essex.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: American poet (1874–1963).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Brand of comics, with superhero characters including Spider-Man, Iron Man, and Captain America.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: King of England (r. 1154–89).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Cambridge historian and ecologist (1939–2015).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: English novelist (b. 1954).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Beech nuts fallen from a beech tree.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Organic component of soil.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Underground labs made to study soil.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: The vocabulary of a language.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 2013).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: English poet (b. 1936).[Return to reference 3](#)

POETRY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In the twenty-first century, oceans are heating up, ice sheets are shrinking, glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, biodiversity is falling, and extreme weather is battering the planet. Although environmental awareness can be traced through the Romantics to earlier poets like Spenser and Chaucer, it was not until the twenty-first century that poets began grappling with the consequences of anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change. Their poems take a variety of approaches, but all have forged innovative ways of seeing, responding to, and thinking about the fate of the planet.

Some, such as Simon Armitage's "Ark," are openly elegiac, mourning the loss of diverse species, the degradation of reefs, ice sheets, and snow caps. Others, such as Peter Reading's "Clockwise (from the bottom)," assume a prophetic stance, satirically foretelling devastation. Still others, such as Vahni Capildeo's "Book of Dreams / Livre de Cauchemars," VI, present a dream vision of the future—or nightmare, as the French subtitle has it. In some climate poems, such as Reading's, the perspective is global. In others, such as Capildeo's poem set in the Caribbean, the focus is on the local effects of worldwide warming. Similarly, Seamus Heaney scrutinizes a glacier melting in Iceland, Patience Agbabi overhears rivers flooding in climate-sensitive Nepal, and in "Rainforest in the Sleep Room," Pascale Petit recounts the deforestation and bio-depletion of the Amazon, a human intrusion she figuratively compares to a lobotomy.

Climate change poses difficulties for representing time and space. How can a brief poem convey the long, layered timescale of climatic shift? In the compressed language of "Höfn," Heaney evokes the ages-long processes of glacier formation, followed by rapid, fearful warming. In "ECO₂nomics" Agbabi reflects another temporal complexity of climate change, how seasons become confused, as winter merges with spring. Or as Craig Santos Perez wryly puts it, "It was summer all winter long." Like time, space becomes confused. Recalling a long-haul flight from London to Delhi, Agbabi conflates

up with down, air with earth, the plane's movement—the "airbus cuts a tunnel through the air"—with the dangerous flooding caused by emissions from it and other sources. In Armitage's "Ark," widely separated locations seem to merge—Latin America and Antarctica, the hippos of Africa and the public housing estates of Britain.

The human and the natural had long been enmeshed in the pastoral tradition of a sympathetic nature; but an endangered, humanity-degraded nature can provide far less solace or refuge. Rewriting the modern American poet Wallace Stevens in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier," Craig Santos Perez affirms, "Humans and animals / are kin. / Humans and animals and glaciers / are kin." But as he and other poets indicate, the refusal to honor this kinship is jeopardizing not only animals and glaciers but also the humans who hold the planet's future in their hands.

SEAMUS HEANEY

A poet of the natural world and of humanity's complex entanglement with it, Seamus Heaney (1939–2013; see the headnote to him earlier in this volume) commented that "environmental issues have to a large extent changed the mind of poetry": "at this stage," he explained, with a reference to the late nineteenth-century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "nobody can have an uncomplicated Hopkinsian trust in the self-refreshing powers of nature." If nature once functioned as an uncorrupted alternative space with redemptive powers, it can no longer do so to the extent that it is seen as profoundly shaped by human activities.

In "Höfn" Heaney meditates on an endangered glacier. He wrote the poem after flying in a small propeller plane over Vatnajökull, also known as the Vatna Glacier, the largest ice cap in Iceland and one of the world's largest glaciers, en route from Reykjavik to the fishing town of Höfn. The poem compares the melting glacier to an enormous beast with multiple *tongues*, a term for glacial extensions into the sea. Human populations now ponder their precarious fate in the face of the melting they have caused. The poem's compounds suggest Old English and Old Norse kennings, words bolted together in an ancient, frozen world that now threatens to come undone as the "Undead" glacier melts. The poem implicitly acknowledges that the airflight that made it possible is complicit in the destruction it witnesses.

Höfn¹

The three-tongued glacier² has begun to melt.
What will we do, they ask, when boulder-milt³
Comes wallowing across the delta flats

5 And the miles-deep shag ice makes its move?
I saw it, ridged and rock-set, from above,
Undead grey-gristed earth-pelt, aeon⁴-scruff,

And feared its coldness that still seemed enough
To iceblock the plane window dimmed with breath,
Deepfreeze the seep of adamantine tilth⁵

10 And every warm, mouthwatering word of mouth.

2006

Endnotes

- Note 1: Town visited by Heaney after flying over Vatnajökull, or the Vatna Glacier, the largest ice cap in Iceland and one of the world's largest glaciers.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: An ice tongue extends from a glacier into the sea.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *milt* is an obsolete word for *rot*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: *Aeon* is a spelling for *eon*, a major division of geological time. Also, in a variety of religions and philosophies, a word for long lengths of time, life cycles, or eternity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Soil that's been prepared for planting. "Adamantine": unbreakable.[Return to reference 5](#)

PATIENCE AGBABI

Nigerian British poet Agbabi (b. 1965; see the headnote to her later in this volume) has helped renew poetic traditions to grapple with contemporary challenges of race, sexuality, and the environment. In 2007, Lloyd's, a London-based insurance company, co-sponsored and published a series of her and two other writers' poems about climate change—an indication of the public's rising interest in the subject. The punning title of one of her six poems, "ECO₂nomics," signals the entanglement of economics, carbon dioxide, and ecology in climate change. Agbabi abruptly juxtaposes a long-haul flight from London to Delhi with the terrestrial destruction it is helping to cause below. Planes and other humanmade technologies are dramatically affecting the seemingly distant earth's crops, rivers, and seasons. She quotes two villagers cited in an article in *The Guardian* about the effect of CO₂ emissions on Nepal, a country described as particularly vulnerable to climate change, like many areas of the global South. It has suffered devastating floods that a villager links by simile to a horrifying sound, "*like 10,000 lorries.*" The poem leaps across time and space, emphasizing lines of connections. Even though inhabitants of Nepal have contributed only a small fraction of carbon emissions, in this interlinked, threatened world, they are at far greater risk of suffering its consequences in the near term.

ECO₂nomics

*The average Briton produces 126 times more carbon dioxide than someone living in Nepal.*¹

I read about freak floods in Nepal
as my London-Delhi long-haul

airbus cuts a tunnel through the air.
0°C. *It was like a wall of water.*²

5 CO₂, -3, up here it's Winter;
down there, December, Printemps³

is early on the banks of the Seine.
It means that crop yields are going down.

10 The plane—*it sounded like 10,000 lorries*—
makes a constant burr, a snowdrop buries
its name, beats its estimated time of arrival.
Then all the land started moving like a river.

10,000 metres above sea level
the plane heaves like a tidal wave.

2007

Endnotes

- Note 1: The info under the title about CO₂ emissions comes after a report in the *Guardian*, "Nepal's farmers on the front line

of global climate change”—John Vidal, Kathmandu, Dec. 2, 2006
[*Agbabi's note*].[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The italicized quotes in this poem are mostly attributed to Sherbahadur Tamang, a Nepalese villager quoted in the *Guardian* article mentioned above. One quote, “It means that crop yields are going down,” is attributed to another villager, Tekmadur Majsi. These villagers describe two southern Nepalese villages flooded with increasing frequency and intensity[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Spring (French).[Return to reference 3](#)

PETER READING

Born in Liverpool, Peter Reading (1946–2011) studied painting at the Liverpool College of Art. Working for many years as a weighbridge operator at an animal feedmill in Shropshire, he eventually turned full-time to poetry and over the years published twenty-six collections. His work tends to be mordant, imbued with a recognition of the quotidian's capacity to turn grotesque. "Time's malice castigates / not only me," he writes, but "also fair governments, concepts, zeniths," leading to a bleak conclusion: "all which we valued nears expiry."

In Reading's late volumes, "Time's malice" takes on the special urgency of climate change. "Clockwise (from the bottom)," a poem written after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had issued dire predictions in its fourth report, hurtles toward environmental doom, not bothering to stop between title and the first stanza. The prophetic satire envisions the consequences of unchecked fossil-fuel emissions. Each of its forty-one, three-beat lines marks a year in the march toward a projected temperature rise of 4° Celsius. With grim poetic economy, the tightly constructed poem devotes a clipped sentence to each region, starting from the bottom of the globe with "Antarctic / glacial meltdown," and then moving north in a clockwise motion. The poem's thirteen stanzas—one more than the hands of a clock—proceed relentlessly across the barren Americas to the "snow-free Alps" to "Polynesia: sunk." In its final lines, the poem opens a set of parentheses but does not close them, "(all hands, &c., &c . . .)" trailing off into a future better averted, but terrifyingly possible.

Clockwise (from the bottom),^{[1](#)}

- 5 4 degrees Celsius up,
40 years on: Antarctic
glacial meltdown, ergo,
sea levels risen (albeit
most marine life extinct).
- South America: deluge,
deglaciation,^{[2](#)} desert,
uninhabitable
(by humankind, that is).
- 10 North America: drought,
flood, hurricane, desert,
uninhabitable
(by humankind, that is).
- 15 Canada: now warm, fertile
(all hands battle to live there).
- Greenland's icesheet thawed.
- 20 Scandinavia/UK/
Russia/Siberia:
ideal growing conditions
(all hands war to get there).
- Southern Europe: desert,
snow-free Alps, dry rivers.
- Middle East: same old testament.
- Asia: Himalayan

25 deglaciation, floods;
Bangladesh abandoned,
ditto South India,
Pakistan &c.

30 Southern China: dried rivers
and aquifers³ mean
the region is abandoned,
monsoons erode the earth,
dustbowls only obtain.

35 Polynesia: sunk.

Australia: in the north,
and in Tas.,⁴ 'compact cities'—
all hands at war to get there—
the mass is wilderness.

40 New Zealand: densely populous,
intensive farming and all that
(all hands, &c., &c . . .

2010

Endnotes

- Note 1: This poem proceeds clockwise across the globe, from Antarctica to South America to New Zealand, in forty-one lines, one for each year before the predicted rise of 4 degrees Celsius if emissions were unchecked, in thirteen stanzas, one more than the numbers on a clockface.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: In geology, the retreat or melting of glaciers and ice.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Underground rock that contains groundwater, commonly extracted by a well.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Shortening of *Tasmania*, an island state of Australia. [Return to reference 4](#)

VAHNI CAPILDEO

Born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in 1973 and living in the UK since 1991, the Trinidadian Scottish poet Vahni Capildeo attended Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship, where they earned a D.Phil. in English on translation theory and Old Norse. They have researched for the *Oxford English Dictionary* and taught at multiple universities in the UK.

"The Book of Dreams / Livre de Cauchemars," VI, is a poem of shifting, spectatorial perception. Like a dream, the Caribbean world it portrays is nightmarishly changeable, as it undergoes the dire effects of sea level rise. In the poem, the speaker watches as boys from a Trinidadian school play football (soccer) in rising waters near a new hotel, its grounds periodically saturated with sea water. In Capildeo's dry, impersonal description, the match swells into the surreal: "How were they managing it? Their knees were lifting above the / waves." Crisp, vivid similes accumulate, deepening the poem's un/reality and anticipating the coming merger of water, vegetation, animal, and human. Waves follow "one another like one ridged iguana moving from branch to branch," and the players are "thin and whippy like coconut trees." "We were not enjoying watching the boys playing football in the sea," the speaker observes, as the joy of following a game dissolves into the horror of bearing witness to catastrophic inundation: "The Atlantic was going to join the match, and come in to / the hotel afterwards." Can we wake from such a *cauchemar*, the poem seems to ask, or is this now reality?

From The Book of Dreams / Livre de Cauchemars

VI

Someone had developed the bay since our last visit.

The drive north
was the same as for the more famous bathing-
place; only a little
further. We parked and began the uncertain walk
(what should the
feet expect? blown sand over paved path, or deep
sand? mud or

5 quicksand? broken bottle or quartz?), to arrive at
the tight little curve.

The lines in the sea threw up walls of light, drawing
an imaginary
stadium around the bay—an under-resourced
stadium whose build-
ing contractor had run off with the cash: the walls
of light, lined like
sea, were like corrugated metal, grey and splashed
with rust or the

10 red of rained-on national slogans.

It wasn't a question of us arriving late: the grey and
rust, scrub and
dust, in a place indubitably holiday destination-ish
for the people
who lived on the island even more than for the thin-
on-the-ground
tourists. Up till the previous bend in the road, the
day had retained

its colour.

15 The match had not started.
We walked down the steep slope to what was not
defined enough
to be a beach—more the area belonging to the sea.
The ground
was damp-packed, indicating that sometimes but not
always it was
20 below water. We turned left, or south-west, and up a
smaller slope.
The pleasant, ramshackle new hotel, two and a half
storeys high,
overlooking the bay, had an old-fashioned gallery
running the
length of each floor. Perhaps not belonging to the
hotel, there was a
not-imaginary slice of stadium, or rather seats in
tiered stands and
25 something like a barbecue area, covering the
western part of the
angle of the small bay. That was new. It
looked worn.
The match was starting. We sat on metal folding
chairs in the first
floor gallery, to watch the boys play football¹ in
the sea.
'Eh-eh! But what are you doing here!' It was the
drum majorette
30 from the Form II March Past parade—how many
years ago? Grown
up now, pretty in red, with a frosty can of
something in her hand.
Retired headmistresses. Half-remembered
prefects.² Everybody's

aunt in a flowered hat and coral lipstick, the
weight of a picnic
cooler testing the strength of her talcum-thick³
wrist. Somebody's
35 father (but hadn't he died?) trying harder to be
friendly since he
had betrayed his wife. The boys from the College of
the Immaculate
Conception,⁴ out of uniform and in red or white
cotton T-shirts that
burned and cowed over the forbidden meagreness
that, shyly and
muskily, was—not their bodies—was also-them.
Other boys from
40 their college were in the sea, all at sea, playing
football in the sea.
We were gathered there together to watch the
match.
How were they managing it? Their knees were
lifting above the
waves. Despite the absence of goalposts, and the
shifting depth of
water, the boys seemed to know where to go. They
were playing side-
45 on to the waves; side-on to us. The waves came in
faster, following
one another like one ridged iguana moving from
branch to branch.
The boys were thin and whippy like coconut trees,
heads ferocious
clusters of concentration.
'The match going well!'
50 But a dark cloud was blowing up, between the
open sea and the

edge of mountain. And the boys would not stop
playing. And the
wind was blowing up too, chill and bitter and salt,
what the Atlantic
brings to the tropics and is not 'tropical'. The drops
of rain then,
heavy like one cent coins, hitting us like spiteful
alms. And the boys
55 seemed unable to stop playing. And they were
kicking the ball up
somehow from under greater and greater depth of
water, and we
remarked their sportsmanship from their elbows,
the tops of their
torsos, the struggling coconut-heads above the
waves, in between
the waves. They were in deeper. The sea was
nearer. Nearer to us.
60 We were not enjoying watching the boys playing
football in the sea.
They were playing the match of their lives.
Under the rimlet of every wave gasping further up
on to the damp-
packed ground, the sea brought more darkness.
Then the approximate stadium of the bay began,
most impressively,
65 to acquire a fourth wall.
The Atlantic was going to join the match, and come
in to
the hotel afterwards.

2014, 2016

Endnotes

- Note 1: Soccer.[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Students charged with authority over younger schoolmates; more generally, chief officers or magistrates.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Talcum is one of the softest minerals.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago.[Return to reference 4](#)

CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ

Born in 1980 on the Pacific Island of Guåhan (Guam), Craig Santos Perez has published eco-poetry, essays, criticism, reviews, and academic scholarship. He has also released spoken word albums and has performed his work at poetry festivals and conferences. His poetry is centered on Native Chamorro experience and language, criticizing the ecological ramifications of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, as well as gesturing toward what one poem calls a "horizon of care." He teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier," Perez "recycles" American modernist poet Wallace Stevens's influential poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." Perez adapts Stevens's cubistic array of perspectives to defamiliarize an image of climate change so ubiquitous and clichéd as to be hard to see. Reversing Stevens's sequence, Perez starts with XIII and wends backward to a beginning that is an end. Perez reflects on the catastrophic threat to glaciers posed by climate change—their dwindling, breaking, rumbling, retreating, calving, and, as the final stanza brings home, melting. Whereas warmth often figures as a life-giving force, here human-derived heat has melted the last of what was "once 200,000 glaciers." Perez's many ways of "looking" also remind us that poetry offers a way of knowing: "I know, too," the speaker in the sixth stanza avers, "that the glacier is involved / in what I know." The glacier is involved in our knowing, and, as Perez's poem poignantly reminds us, our survival is inseparable from its fate: "We are of one ecology," "Humans and animals and glaciers / are kin."

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier

*recycling Wallace Stevens*¹

XIII

Among starving polar bears,
the only moving thing
was the edge of a glacier.

XII

5 We are of one ecology
like a planet
in which there were once 200,000 glaciers.

XI

The glacier absorbs greenhouse gas.
We are a large part of the biosphere.

X

10 Humans and animals
are kin.
Humans and animals and glaciers
are kin.

IX

We do not know which to fear more,
the terror of change

15 or the terror of uncertainty,
the glacier calving
or just after.

VIII

Icebergs fill the vast ocean
with titanic wrecks.
20 The mass of the glacier
disappears, to and fro.
The threat
hidden in the crevasse²
an irreversible clause.

VII

25 O vulnerable humans,
why do you engineer sea walls?
Do you not see how the glacier
already floods the streets
of the cities around you?

VI

30 I know king tides,
and lurid, unprecedented storms;
but I know, too,
that the glacier is involved
in what I know.

V

35 When the glacial terminus broke,
it marked the beginning
of one of many waves.

IV

At the rumble of a glacier
losing its equilibrium,
40 every tourist in the new Arctic
chased ice quickly.

III

Shell³ explored the poles
for offshore drilling.
Once, we blocked them,
45 in that we understood
the risk of an oil spill
to a glacier.

II

The sea is rising.
The glacier must be retreating.

I

50 It was summer all winter.
It was melting
and it was going to melt.
The last glacier fits
in our warm hands.

2016

Endnotes

- Note 1: American poet (1879–1955). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A deep crack in a glacier or ice sheet. [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Founded in 1907 and one of the largest oil companies in the world.[Return to reference 3](#)

PASCALE PETIT

Born in France in 1953, Pascale Petit, a British poet of Indian, Welsh, and French heritage, studied sculpting at the Royal College of Art. In her collections of poetry, she explores questions of gender, embodiment, and the environment. Her collection *Mama Amazonica* was the inaugural winner of the Laurel Prize for Poetry in 2020, a prize for environmental poetry founded by British poet laureate Simon Armitage to raise awareness of the climate crisis.

A poem in this collection, "Rainforest in the Sleep Room," personifies the Amazon rainforest as a human patient receiving medical care. Like road construction through the rainforest, some medical interventions, though well intended, can be horribly destructive. The poem opens with a shocking image, comparing human intrusion into the Amazon to a lobotomy: "The highway goes through / the Amazon's brain / like an icepick through an eye-socket." More violence accrues through other similes: bulldozers cut through the Amazon's "cortex / like a scalpel." Petit's personifications vividly convey how destruction of the Amazon, a rainforest often anthropomorphized as the lungs of the world, wipes out a sustainable ecology for human and nonhuman animals. As a result of this persistent violence, in the end, "The only animals left / are grainy films / on camera traps." The poem concludes with a "still small voice," one of extinction: "a recording of the last / musician-wren." This voice, the poem concludes, "is like the beginning of the world." We might ask what such a beginning portends, and if it's enough to resist the cruelties to the planet enumerated in Petit's poem.

Rainforest in the Sleep Room

1

The highway goes through
the Amazon's¹ brain
like an ice pick through an eye-socket.

5 First we clear her synapses²
then she forgets her animals.

2

Our bulldozers drive through
the rainbow boa of her cortex
like a scalpel—

10 those sleeping coils
still dreaming up new species,

3

hallucinations we've blitzed
with ECT.³

The bilateral current purrs
through her frontal lobes
15 like a forest of songbirds
electrocuted by rain.

4

20 Afterwards, her thoughts are nestless,
 except for a few chicks
 up in the last ironwoods,
 patrolled by armed guards.

 Scientists climb ropes
 to monitor her stats,
 bring motherless macaws

25 down to incubators,
 measuring their wings,
 weighing naked souls,

5

 as if she's a patient
 in the Sleep Room
 who won't wake—

30 her dreams treelines
 traced by the EEG pen.⁴

6

 The only animals left
 are grainy films
 on camera traps

7

35 and a recording of the last
 musician-wren

 whose still small voice⁵
 is like the beginning of the world.

Endnotes

- Note 1: South American river; largest in the world by water volume.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Medical preparation for a frontal lobotomy.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Electroconvulsive therapy, commonly known as “shock therapy.”[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Electroencephalogram (EEG) given by a wireless portable “pen” device to measure brain waves.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: After biblical destruction by earthquake, whirlwind, and fire, Ezekiel hears the “still small voice” of God (1 Kings 19:12).[Return to reference 5](#)

SIMON ARMITAGE

The publication in the magazine *Scientific American* of "Ark" by British poet laureate Simon Armitage (b. 1963; see headnote to him later in this volume), a poem written to commemorate the naming of a new polar research ship, exemplifies how science and literature can come together to address the unprecedented challenge of climate change. To convey the gravity of the situation, Armitage reimagines the biblical story of Noah's Ark for the Anthropocene. Now the flood results not from a divine judgment on human wickedness but from the sea level rise of anthropogenic climate change. Now the dove can bring back not an olive leaf, evidencing the promise of receding waters and dry land, but "a sprig of tinsel snagged in its beak, / a yard of fishing-line binding its feet." Now instead of evincing the hope of renewed life, it has "wings slicked in a rainbow of oil," a catastrophic degradation of the exalted biblical symbol of the Covenant.

Availing himself of the compression of poetry, Armitage shows that global warming has collapsed the distances between spaces on the globe—between Latin America and Antarctica, the African hippo and the British housing estate. To lament the losses of climate change, he echoes a Scottish folk song in lines such as "*Bring back, bring back the leaf. / Bring back the reed and the reef.*" And to mourn species extinction, he deploys alliteration, rhythm, and rhyme: "*Bring back the fern, the fish, the frond and the fowl, / the golden toad and the pygmy owl.*" Intermixing elegiac grief with satire, he mocks the careless littering of the oceans with metallic and plastic junk—"wrappers and bottles and nurdles and cans." Is there still time to reverse the slide toward ruination of the planet? Or will future generations look back on poems like Armitage's and on scientific reports and see warnings that went unheeded?

Ark¹

They sent out a dove:² it wobbled home,
wings slicked in a rainbow³ of oil,
a sprig of tinsel snagged in its beak,
a yard of fishing-line binding its feet.

5 *Bring back, bring back the leaf.*⁴

They sent out an arctic fox:
it plodded the bays
of the northern fringe
in muddy socks
and a nylon cape.

10 *Bring back, bring back the leaf.*
 Bring back the reed and the reef,
 *set the ice sheet back on its frozen plinth,*⁵
 tuck the restless watercourse⁶ into its bed,
 sit the glacier down on its highland throne,
15 *put the snow cap back on the mountain peak.*

Let the northern lights be the northern lights
*not the alien glow over Glasgow or Leeds.*⁷

A camel capsized in a tropical flood.
Caimans⁸ dozed in Antarctic lakes.
20 Polymers rolled in the sturgeon's⁹ blood.
 Hippos wandered the housing estates.

Bring back, bring back the leaf.
Bring back the tusk and the horn
unshorn.

25 *Bring back the fern, the fish, the frond and the fowl,*
 the golden toad and the pygmy owl,
 revisit the scene
 where swallowtails fly
30 *through acres of unexhausted sky.*

 They sent out a boat.
 Go little breaker,
 splinter the pack-ice and floes, nose
 through the rafts and pads
35 of wrappers and bottles and nurdles¹ and cans,
 the bergs and atolls and islands and states
 of plastic bags and micro-beads
 and the forests of smoke.

Bring back, bring back the leaf,
40 *bring back the river and sea.*

2020

Endnotes

- Note 1: In the biblical story of Noah's Ark, God directs Noah to build an ark and bring his family as well as one male and female animal of each species to safety. The humans and animals on the ark would repopulate the world in the wake of the great flood.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Noah releases a dove after the flood to find land. When the dove returns with an olive branch in its mouth, it becomes a symbol of hope.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Symbol of the covenant God makes with all living creatures to never flood the Earth again.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Variation on the refrain of the Scottish folk tune "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean." The refrain is "Bring back, bring back, O bring back my Bonnie to me."[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: A solid base, usually for a statue or column.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A channel where water flows.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: City in England. "Glasgow": city in Scotland.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A reptile closely related to the alligator.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A type of fish. "Polymers": natural or synthetic materials characterized by large, repeating molecular structures. Many plastics are polymers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A small pellet of plastic, or a microplastic.[Return to reference 1](#)

MARGARET ATWOOD

b. 1939

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa, Canada, into a family with roots in Nova Scotia, but when she was seven her family moved to Toronto. She did not receive formal schooling until she was eleven, because her family spent a large part of every year in the northern wildernesses of Quebec and Ontario. There, her father, a forest entomologist, pursued his research on insects, while she immersed herself in both the woods and books. The Canadian wilderness is the setting of a number of her poems, novels, and stories, although her work has ranged among a variety of real and fictional locales, including the Caribbean island of *Bodily Harm* (1981) and the dystopian Boston of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Atwood received her B.A. in English from Victoria College, University of Toronto, in 1961. The next year she earned an M.A. at Harvard, later returning for doctoral research she did not complete, though several volumes of her poetry were published during that time. Before 1972, when she became a full-time writer, Atwood taught at Canadian universities in Vancouver, Montreal, Alberta, and Toronto.

Atwood is the author of more than a dozen collections of poetry, and more than twenty volumes of imaginative prose—both novels and short fiction—as well as a large number of essays and critical works. Her earliest books include the poems collected in the self-published *Double Persephone* (1961), and then the conventionally published *The Circle Game* (1964), a collection that won the

Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. Precisely carved language, doubleness of vision, ironic inversions of expectations—these are among the qualities that have garnered attention for her poetry. A poem such as “Miss July Grows Older” suggests the complexity of Atwood's surprising and witty examinations of gender relations. It opens with an arresting question in the voice of a smart, wryly self-critical beauty queen who, hardly a passive object, has skillfully manipulated men: “How much longer can I get away / with being so fucking cute?” Atwood has said that poetry is “the heart of the language, the activity through which language is renewed and kept alive.”

She has also said that, for her, “fiction is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community.” Although she continued to publish collections of poetry over several decades, it is Atwood's fiction that has made her perhaps Canada's best-known writer. Her first novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), explores a woman's eating disorders long before the sexual politics of anorexia and bulimia were widely discussed. Several of her subsequent novels were short-listed for the Booker Prize, including her most famous work, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), about a woman's struggle against imprisonment within sharply hierarchical gender roles in a religious fundamentalist dystopia; *Cat's Eye* (1989), about power and cruelty in girlhood friendships; and *Alias Grace* (1996), a fictionalized narrative of a historical nineteenth-century female servant accused of murder. *The Blind Assassin* (2000), which nests various stories within one another, finally won Atwood the Booker Prize. She won her second Booker for *The Testaments* (2019), a prize she shared with Bernardine Evaristo, who won for *Girl, Woman, Other*. Atwood joins Peter Carey, J. M. Coetzee, and Hilary Mantel as the only authors to have won a Booker twice.

Since the publication of her early book of essays, *Survival* (1972), Atwood has helped bring attention and shape to Canadian literature. Early in that book, she hazards sweeping comparisons between Canadian literature and both “the sense of adventure or danger” in the literature of the United States (its key symbol being “The

Frontier”) and the “smugness and/or sense of security” in the literature of England (“The Island”). In her view, Canadian literature reflects a distinct experience. “Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it but of those who made it back, from the awful experience—the North, the snowstorm, the sinking ship—that killed everyone else. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of his survival.” Some of Atwood’s fictional characters are survivors of the Canadian wilderness, including the young female protagonist of *Surfacing*, a novel published in the same year as *Survival*, who journeys deep into the wilderness in search of her lost father. The main character in *Cat’s Eye* reviews and relives the psychological damage inflicted on her by female friendships and bullying during her childhood and teenage years in the forest.

In the short story “Death by Landscape,” the central character, Lois, is also a survivor of loss and painful memories, of vexed female friendship and power relations lived out in the Canadian wilderness. Reflecting on coming of age at camp, Lois remembers the singing, the stratification, the role-playing as American Indians, but her main focus is her friendship with an American girl, Lucy, who imports into Canada her troubled home life. After a defining incident on a canoe trip, “Death by Landscape,” like other of Atwood’s novels and short fiction, becomes a narrative in part about the power of stories to give meaning, as well as their potential duplicity—about the power of narrative both to condemn and to explore, of language both to cripple and to liberate.

Death by Landscape

Now that the boys are grown up and Rob is dead, Lois has moved to a condominium apartment in one of the newer waterfront developments. She is relieved not to have to worry about the lawn, or about the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic and eating the insulation off the wiring, or about strange noises. This building has a security system, and the only plant life is in pots in the solarium.

Lois is glad she's been able to find an apartment big enough for her pictures. They are more crowded together than they were in the house, but this arrangement gives the walls a European look: blocks of pictures, above and beside one another, rather than one over the chesterfield,¹ one over the fireplace, one in the front hall, in the old acceptable manner of sprinkling art around so it does not get too intrusive. This way has more of an impact. You know it's not supposed to be furniture.

None of the pictures is very large, which doesn't mean they aren't valuable. They are paintings, or sketches and drawings, by artists who were not nearly as well known when Lois began to buy them as they are now. Their work later turned up on stamps, or as silk-screen reproductions hung in the principals' offices of high schools, or as jigsaw puzzles, or on beautifully printed calendars sent out by corporations as Christmas gifts, to their less important clients. These artists painted mostly in the twenties and thirties and forties; they painted landscapes. Lois has two Tom Thomsons, three A. Y. Jacksons, a Lawren Harris. She has an Arthur Lismer, she has a J. E. H. MacDonald. She has a David Milne.² They are pictures of convoluted tree trunks on an island or pink wave-smoothed stone, with more islands behind; of a lake with rough, bright, sparsely wooded cliffs; of a vivid river shore with a tangle of bush and two

beached canoes, one red, one grey; of a yellow autumn woods with the ice-blue gleam of a pond half-seen through the interlaced branches.

It was Lois who'd chosen them. Rob had no interest in art, although he could see the necessity of having something on the walls. He left all the decorating decisions to her, while providing the money, of course. Because of this collection of hers, Lois's friends—especially the men—have given her the reputation of having a good nose for art investments.

But this is not why she bought the pictures, way back then. She bought them because she wanted them. She wanted something that was in them, although she could not have said at the time what it was. It was not peace: she does not find them peaceful in the least. Looking at them fills her with a wordless unease. Despite the fact that there are no people in them or even animals, it's as if there is something, or someone, looking back out.

When she was thirteen, Lois went on a canoe trip. She'd only been on overnights before. This was to be a long one, into the trackless wilderness, as Cappie put it. It was Lois's first canoe trip, and her last.

Cappie was the head of the summer camp to which Lois had been sent ever since she was nine. Camp Manitou, it was called; it was one of the better ones, for girls, though not the best. Girls of her age whose parents could afford it were routinely packed off to such camps, which bore a generic resemblance to one another. They favoured Indian names and had hearty, energetic leaders, who were called Cappie or Skip or Scottie. At these camps you learned to swim well and sail, and paddle a canoe, and perhaps ride a horse or play tennis. When you weren't doing these things you could do Arts and Crafts and turn out dingy, lumpish clay ashtrays for your mother—mothers smoked more, then—or bracelets made of coloured braided string.

Cheerfulness was required at all times, even at breakfast. Loud shouting and the banging of spoons on the tables were allowed, and

even encouraged, at ritual intervals. Chocolate bars were rationed, to control tooth decay and pimples. At night, after supper, in the dining hall or outside around a mosquito-infested campfire ring for special treats, there were singsongs. Lois can still remember all the words to "My Darling Clementine," and to "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," with acting-out gestures: a rippling of the hands for "the ocean," two hands together under the cheek for "lies." She will never be able to forget them, which is a sad thought.

Lois thinks she can recognize women who went to these camps, and were good at it. They have a hardness to their handshakes, even now; a way of standing, legs planted firmly and farther apart than usual; a way of sizing you up, to see if you'd be any good in a canoe—the front, not the back. They themselves would be in the back. They would call it the stern.

She knows that such camps still exist, although Camp Manitou does not. They are one of the few things that haven't changed much. They now offer copper enamelling, and functionless pieces of stained glass baked in electric ovens, though judging from the productions of her friends' grandchildren the artistic standards have not improved.

To Lois, encountering it in the first year after the war, Camp Manitou seemed ancient. Its log-sided buildings with the white cement in between the half-logs, its flagpole ringed with whitewashed stones, its weathered grey dock jutting out into Lake Prospect, with its woven rope bumpers and its rusty rings for tying up, its prim round flowerbed of petunias near the office door, must surely have been there always. In truth it dated only from the first decade of the century; it had been founded by Cappie's parents, who'd thought of camping as bracing to the character, like cold showers, and had been passed along to her as an inheritance, and an obligation.

Lois realized, later, that it must have been a struggle for Cappie to keep Camp Manitou going, during the Depression and then the war, when money did not flow freely. If it had been a camp for the very rich, instead of the merely well off, there would have been

fewer problems. But there must have been enough Old Girls, ones with daughters, to keep the thing in operation, though not entirely shipshape: furniture was battered, painted trim was peeling, roofs leaked. There were dim photographs of these Old Girls dotted around the dining hall, wearing ample woollen bathing suits and showing their fat, dimpled legs, or standing, arms twined, in odd tennis outfits with baggy skirts.

In the dining hall, over the stone fireplace that was never used, there was a huge moulting stuffed moose head, which looked somehow carnivorous. It was a sort of mascot; its name was Monty Manitou. The older campers spread the story that it was haunted, and came to life in the dark, when the feeble and undependable lights had been turned off or, due to yet another generator failure, had gone out. Lois was afraid of it at first, but not after she got used to it.

Cappie was the same: you had to get used to her. Possibly she was forty, or thirty-five, or fifty. She had fawn-coloured hair that looked as if it was cut with a bowl. Her head jutted forward, jiggling like a chicken's as she strode around the camp, clutching notebooks and checking things off in them. She was like their minister in church: both of them smiled a lot and were anxious because they wanted things to go well; they both had the same overwashed skins and stringy necks. But all this disappeared when Cappie was leading a singsong, or otherwise leading. Then she was happy, sure of herself, her plain face almost luminous. She wanted to cause joy. At these times she was loved, at others merely trusted.

There were many things Lois didn't like about Camp Manitou, at first. She hated the noisy chaos and spoon-banging of the dining hall, the rowdy singsongs at which you were expected to yell in order to show that you were enjoying yourself. Hers was not a household that encouraged yelling. She hated the necessity of having to write dutiful letters to her parents claiming she was having fun. She could not complain, because camp cost so much money.

She didn't much like having to undress in a roomful of other girls, even in the dim light, although nobody paid any attention, or

sleeping in a cabin with seven other girls, some of whom snored because they had adenoids³ or colds, some of whom had nightmares, or wet their beds and cried about it. Bottom bunks made her feel closed in, and she was afraid of falling out of top ones; she was afraid of heights. She got homesick, and suspected her parents of having a better time when she wasn't there than when she was, although her mother wrote to her every week saying how much they missed her. All this was when she was nine. By the time she was thirteen she liked it. She was an old hand by then.

Lucy was her best friend at camp. Lois had other friends in winter, when there was school and itchy woollen clothing and darkness in the afternoons, but Lucy was her summer friend.

She turned up the second year, when Lois was ten, and a Bluejay. (Chickadees, Bluejays, Ravens, and Kingfishers—these were the names Camp Manitou assigned to the different age groups, a sort of totemic clan system. In those days, thinks Lois, it was birds for girls, animals for boys: wolves, and so forth. Though some animals and birds were suitable and some were not. Never vultures, for instance; never skunks, or rats.)

Lois helped Lucy to unpack her tin trunk and place the folded clothes on the wooden shelves, and to make up her bed. She put her in the top bunk right above her, where she could keep an eye on her. Already she knew that Lucy was an exception, to a good many rules; already she felt proprietorial.

Lucy was from the United States, where the comic books came from, and the movies. She wasn't from New York or Hollywood or Buffalo, the only American cities Lois knew the names of, but from Chicago. Her house was on the lake shore and had gates to it, and grounds. They had a maid, all of the time. Lois's family only had a cleaning lady twice a week.

The only reason Lucy was being sent to *this* camp (she cast a look of minor scorn around the cabin, diminishing it and also offending Lois, while at the same time daunting her) was that her mother had been a camper here. Her mother had been a Canadian

once, but had married her father, who had a patch over one eye, like a pirate. She showed Lois the picture of him in her wallet. He got the patch in the war. "Shrapnel," said Lucy. Lois, who was unsure about shrapnel, was so impressed she could only grunt. Her own two-eyed, unwounded father was tame by comparison.

"My father plays golf," she ventured at last.

"*Everyone* plays golf," said Lucy. "My *mother* plays golf."

Lois's mother did not. Lois took Lucy to see the outhouses and the swimming dock and the dining hall with Monty Manitou's baleful head, knowing in advance they would not measure up.

This was a bad beginning; but Lucy was good-natured, and accepted Camp Manitou with the same casual shrug with which she seemed to accept everything. She would make the best of it, without letting Lois forget that this was what she was doing.

However, there were things Lois knew that Lucy did not. Lucy scratched the tops off all her mosquito bites and had to be taken to the infirmary to be daubed with Ozonol.⁴ She took her T-shirt off while sailing, and although the counsellor spotted her after a while and made her put it back on, she burnt spectacularly, bright red, with the X of her bathing-suit straps standing out in alarming white; she let Lois peel the sheets of whispery-thin burned skin off her shoulders. When they sang "Alouette" around the campfire, she did not know any of the French words. The difference was that Lucy did not care about the things she didn't know, whereas Lois did.

During the next winter, and subsequent winters, Lucy and Lois wrote to each other. They were both only children, at a time when this was thought to be a disadvantage, so in their letters they pretended to be sisters, or even twins. Lois had to strain a little over this, because Lucy was so blonde, with translucent skin and large blue eyes like a doll's, and Lois was nothing out of the ordinary—just a tallish, thinnish, brownish person with freckles. They signed their letters LL, with the L's entwined together like the monograms on a towel. (Lois and Lucy, thinks Lois. How our names date us. Lois Lane, Superman's girlfriend, enterprising female reporter; "I Love

Lucy." Now we are obsolete, and it's little Jennifers, little Emilys, little Alexandras and Carolines and Tiffanys.)

They were more effusive in their letters than they ever were in person. They bordered their pages with X's and O's, but when they met again in the summers it was always a shock. They had changed so much, or Lucy had. It was like watching someone grow up in jolts. At first it would be hard to think up things to say.

But Lucy always had a surprise or two, something to show, some marvel to reveal. The first year she had a picture of herself in a tutu, her hair in a ballerina's knot on the top of her head; she pirouetted around the swimming dock, to show Lois how it was done, and almost fell off. The next year she had given that up and was taking horseback riding. (Camp Manitou did not have horses.) The next year her mother and father had been divorced, and she had a new stepfather, one with both eyes, and a new house, although the maid was the same. The next year, when they had graduated from Bluejays and entered Ravens, she got her period, right in the first week of camp. The two of them snatched some matches from their counsellor, who smoked illegally, and made a small fire out behind the farthest outhouse, at dusk, using their flashlights. They could set all kinds of fires by now; they had learned how in Campcraft. On this fire they burned one of Lucy's used sanitary napkins. Lois is not sure why they did this, or whose idea it was. But she can remember the feeling of deep satisfaction it gave her as the white fluff singed and the blood sizzled, as if some wordless ritual had been fulfilled.

They did not get caught, but then they rarely got caught at any of their camp transgressions. Lucy had such large eyes, and was such an accomplished liar.

This year Lucy is different again: slower, more languorous. She is no longer interested in sneaking around after dark, purloining cigarettes from the counsellor, dealing in black-market candy bars. She is pensive, and hard to wake in the mornings. She doesn't like her stepfather, but she doesn't want to live with her real father either, who has a new wife. She thinks her mother may be having a love

affair with a doctor; she doesn't know for sure, but she's seen them smooching in his car, out on the driveway, when her stepfather wasn't there. It serves him right. She hates her private school. She has a boyfriend, who is sixteen and works as a gardener's assistant. This is how she met him: in the garden. She describes to Lois what it is like when he kisses her—rubbery at first, but then your knees go limp. She has been forbidden to see him, and threatened with boarding school. She wants to run away from home.

Lois has little to offer in return. Her own life is placid and satisfactory, but there is nothing much that can be said about happiness. "You're so lucky," Lucy tells her, a little smugly. She might as well say *boring* because this is how it makes Lois feel.

Lucy is apathetic about the canoe trip, so Lois has to disguise her own excitement. The evening before they are to leave, she slouches into the campfire ring as if coerced, and sits down with a sigh of endurance, just as Lucy does.

Every canoe trip that went out of camp was given a special send-off by Cappie and the section leader and counsellors, with the whole section in attendance. Cappie painted three streaks of red across each of her cheeks with a lipstick. They looked like three-fingered claw marks. She put a blue circle on her forehead with fountain-pen ink, and tied a twisted bandanna around her head and stuck a row of frazzle-ended feathers around it, and wrapped herself in a red-and-black Hudson's Bay blanket. The counsellors, also in blankets but with only two streaks of red, beat on tom-toms made of round wooden cheese boxes with leather stretched over the top and nailed in place. Cappie was Chief Cappeosota. They all had to say "How!" when she walked into the circle and stood there with one hand raised.

Looking back on this, Lois finds it disquieting. She knows too much about Indians: this is why. She knows, for instance, that they should not even be called Indians, and that they have enough worries without other people taking their names and dressing up as them. It has all been a form of stealing.

But she remembers, too, that she was once ignorant of this. Once she loved the campfire, the flickering of light on the ring of faces, the sound of the fake tom-toms, heavy and fast like a scared heartbeat; she loved Cappie in a red blanket and feathers, solemn, as a chief should be, raising her hand and saying, "Greetings, my Ravens." It was not funny, it was not making fun. She wanted to be an Indian. She wanted to be adventurous and pure, and aboriginal.

"You go on big water," says Cappie. This is her idea—all their ideas—of how Indians talk. "You go where no man has ever trod. You go many moons." This is not true. They are only going for a week, not many moons. The canoe route is clearly marked, they have gone over it on a map, and there are prepared campsites with names which are used year after year. But when Cappie says this—and despite the way Lucy rolls up her eyes—Lois can feel the water stretching out, with the shores twisting away on either side, immense and a little frightening.

"You bring back much wampum,"⁵ says Cappie. "Do good in war, my braves, and capture many scalps." This is another of her pretences: that they are boys, and bloodthirsty. But such a game cannot be played by substituting the word "squaw." It would not work at all.

Each of them has to stand up and step forward and have a red line drawn across her cheeks by Cappie. She tells them they must follow in the paths of their ancestors (who most certainly, thinks Lois, looking out the window of her apartment and remembering the family stash of daguerreotypes⁶ and sepia-coloured portraits on her mother's dressing table, the stiff-shirted, black-coated, grim-faced men and the beflounced women with their severe hair and their corseted respectability, would never have considered heading off onto an open lake, in a canoe, just for fun).

At the end of the ceremony they all stood and held hands around the circle, and sang taps. This did not sound very Indian, thinks Lois. It sounded like a bugle call at a military post, in a movie. But Cappie

was never one to be much concerned with consistency, or with archaeology.

After breakfast the next morning they set out from the main dock, in four canoes, three in each. The lipstick stripes have not come off completely, and still show faintly pink, like healing burns. They wear their white denim sailing hats, because of the sun, and thin-striped T-shirts, and pale baggy shorts with the cuffs rolled up. The middle one kneels, propping her rear end against the rolled sleeping bags. The counsellors going with them are Pat and Kip. Kip is no-nonsense; Pat is easier to wheedle, or fool.

There are white puffy clouds and a small breeze. Glints come from the little waves. Lois is in the bow of Kip's canoe. She still can't do a J-stroke very well, and she will have to be in the bow or the middle for the whole trip. Lucy is behind her; her own J-stroke is even worse. She splashes Lois with her paddle, quite a big splash.

"I'll get you back," says Lois.

"There was a stable fly on your shoulder," Lucy says.

Lois turns to look at her, to see if she's grinning. They're in the habit of splashing each other. Back there, the camp has vanished behind the first long point of rock and rough trees. Lois feels as if an invisible rope has broken. They're floating free, on their own, cut loose. Beneath the canoe the lake goes down, deeper and colder than it was a minute before.

"No horsing around in the canoe," says Kip. She's rolled her T-shirt sleeves up to the shoulder; her arms are brown and sinewy, her jaw determined, her stroke perfect. She looks as if she knows exactly what she is doing.

The four canoes keep close together. They sing, raucously and with defiance; they sing "The Quartermaster's Store," and "Clementine," and "Alouette." It is more like bellowing than singing.

After that the wind grows stronger, blowing slantwise against the bows, and they have to put all their energy into shoving themselves through the water.

Was there anything important, anything that would provide some sort of reason or clue to what happened next? Lois can remember everything, every detail; but it does her no good.

They stopped at noon for a swim and lunch, and went on in the afternoon. At last they reached Little Birch, which was the first campsite for overnight. Lois and Lucy made the fire, while the others pitched the heavy canvas tents. The fireplace was already there, flat stones piled into a U. A burned tin can and a beer bottle had been left in it. Their fire went out, and they had to restart it. "Hustle your bustle," said Kip. "We're starving."

The sun went down, and in the pink sunset light they brushed their teeth and spat the toothpaste froth into the lake. Kip and Pat put all the food that wasn't in cans into a packsack and slung it into a tree, in case of bears.

Lois and Lucy weren't sleeping in a tent. They'd begged to be allowed to sleep out; that way they could talk without the others hearing. If it rained, they told Kip, they promised not to crawl dripping into the tent over everyone's legs: they would get under the canoes. So they were out on the point.

Lois tried to get comfortable inside her sleeping bag, which smelled of musty storage and of earlier campers, a stale salty sweetness. She curled herself up, with her sweater rolled up under her head for a pillow and her flashlight inside her sleeping bag so it wouldn't roll away. The muscles of her sore arms were making small pings, like rubber bands breaking.

Beside her Lucy was rustling around. Lois could see the glimmering oval of her white face.

"I've got a rock poking into my back," said Lucy.

"So do I," said Lois. "You want to go into the tent?" She herself didn't, but it was right to ask.

"No," said Lucy. She subsided into her sleeping bag. After a moment she said, "It would be nice not to go back."

"To camp?" said Lois.

"To Chicago," said Lucy. "I hate it there."

"What about your boyfriend?" said Lois. Lucy didn't answer. She was either asleep or pretending to be.

There was a moon, and a movement of the trees. In the sky there were stars, layers of stars that went down and down. Kip said that when the stars were bright like that instead of hazy it meant bad weather later on. Out on the lake there were two loons, calling to each other in their insane, mournful voices. At the time it did not sound like grief. It was just background.

The lake in the morning was flat calm. They skimmed along over the glassy surface, leaving V-shaped trails behind them; it felt like flying. As the sun rose higher it got hot, almost too hot. There were stable flies in the canoes, landing on a bare arm or leg for a quick sting. Lois hoped for wind.

They stopped for lunch at the next of the named campsites, Lookout Point. It was called this because, although the site itself was down near the water on a flat shelf of rock, there was a sheer cliff nearby and a trail that led up to the top. The top was the lookout, although what you were supposed to see from there was not clear. Kip said it was just a view.

Lois and Lucy decided to make the climb anyway. They didn't want to hang around waiting for lunch. It wasn't their turn to cook, though they hadn't avoided much by not doing it, because cooking lunch was no big deal, it was just unwrapping the cheese and getting out the bread and peanut butter, but Pat and Kip always had to do their woodsy act and boil up a billy tin^z for their own tea.

They told Kip where they were going. You had to tell Kip where you were going, even if it was only a little way into the woods to get dry twigs for kindling. You could never go anywhere without a buddy.

"Sure," said Kip, who was crouching over the fire, feeding driftwood into it. "Fifteen minutes to lunch."

"Where are they off to?" said Pat. She was bringing their billy tin of water from the lake.

"Lookout," said Kip.

"Be careful," said Pat. She said it as an afterthought, because it was what she always said.

"They're old hands," Kip said.

Lois looks at her watch: it's ten to twelve. She is the watch-minder; Lucy is careless of time. They walk up the path, which is dry earth and rocks, big rounded pinky-grey boulders or split-open ones with jagged edges. Spindly balsam and spruce trees grow to either side, the lake is blue fragments to the left. The sun is right overhead; there are no shadows anywhere. The heat comes up at them as well as down. The forest is dry and crackly.

It isn't far, but it's a steep climb and they're sweating when they reach the top. They wipe their faces with their bare arms, sit gingerly down on a scorching-hot rock, five feet from the edge but too close for Lois. It's a lookout all right, a sheer drop to the lake and a long view over the water, back the way they've come. It's amazing to Lois that they've travelled so far, over all that water, with nothing to propel them but their own arms. It makes her feel strong. There are all kinds of things she is capable of doing.

"It would be quite a dive off here," says Lucy.

"You'd have to be nuts," says Lois.

"Why?" says Lucy. "It's really deep. It goes straight down." She stands up and takes a step nearer the edge. Lois gets a stab in her midriff, the kind she gets when a car goes too fast over a bump.

"Don't," she says.

"Don't what?" says Lucy, glancing around at her mischievously. She knows how Lois feels about heights. But she turns back. "I really have to pee," she says.

"You have toilet paper?" says Lois, who is never without it. She digs in her shorts pocket.

"Thanks," says Lucy.

They are both adept at peeing in the woods: doing it fast so the mosquitoes don't get you, the underwear pulled up between the knees, the squat with the feet apart so you don't wet your legs, facing downhill. The exposed feeling of your bum, as if someone is

looking at you from behind. The etiquette when you're with someone else is not to look. Lois stands up and starts to walk back down the path, to be out of sight.

"Wait for me?" says Lucy.

Lois climbed down, over and around the boulders, until she could not see Lucy; she waited. She could hear the voices of the others, talking and laughing, down near the shore. One voice was yelling, "Ants! Ants!" Someone must have sat on an ant hill. Off to the side, in the woods, a raven was croaking, a hoarse single note.

She looked at her watch: it was noon. This is when she heard the shout.

She has gone over and over it in her mind since, so many times that the first, real shout has been obliterated, like a footprint trampled by other footprints. But she is sure (she is almost positive, she is nearly certain) that it was not a shout of fear. Not a scream. More like a cry of surprise, cut off too soon. Short, like a dog's bark.

"Lucy?" Lois said. Then she called "Lucy!" By now she was clambering back up, over the stones of the path. Lucy was not up there. Or she was not in sight.

"Stop fooling around," Lois said. "It's lunch-time." But Lucy did not rise from behind a rock or step out, smiling, from behind a tree. The sunlight was all around; the rocks looked white. "This isn't funny!" Lois said, and it wasn't, panic was rising in her, the panic of a small child who does not know where the bigger ones are hidden. She could hear her own heart. She looked quickly around; she lay down on the ground and looked over the edge of the cliff. It made her feel cold. There was nothing.

She went back down the path, stumbling; she was breathing too quickly; she was too frightened to cry. She felt terrible—guilty and dismayed, as if she had done something very bad, by mistake. Something that could never be repaired. "Lucy's gone," she told Kip.

Kip looked up from her fire, annoyed. The water in the billy can was boiling. "What do you mean, gone?" she said. "Where did she go?"

"I don't know," said Lois. "She's just gone."

No one had heard the shout, but then no one had heard Lois calling, either. They had been talking among themselves, by the water.

Kip and Pat went up to the lookout and searched and called, and blew their whistles. Nothing answered.

Then they came back down, and Lois had to tell exactly what had happened. The other girls all sat in a circle and listened to her. Nobody said anything. They all looked frightened, especially Pat and Kip. They were the leaders. You did not just lose a camper like this, for no reason at all.

"Why did you leave her alone?" said Kip.

"I was just down the path," said Lois. "I told you. She had to go to the bathroom." She did not say *pee* in front of people older than herself.

Kip looked disgusted.

"Maybe she just walked off into the woods and got turned around," said one of the girls.

"Maybe she's doing it on purpose," said another.

Nobody believed either of these theories.

They took the canoes and searched around the base of the cliff, and peered down into the water. But there had been no sound of falling rock; there had been no splash. There was no clue, nothing at all. Lucy had simply vanished.

That was the end of the canoe trip. It took them the same two days to go back that it had taken coming in, even though they were short a paddler. They did not sing.

After that, the police went in a motorboat, with dogs; they were the Mounties⁸ and the dogs were German shepherds, trained to follow trails in the woods. But it had rained since, and they could find nothing.

Lois is sitting in Cappie's office. Her face is bloated with crying, she's seen that in the mirror. By now she feels numbed; she feels as if she has drowned. She can't stay here. It has been too much of a shock.

Tomorrow her parents are coming to take her away. Several of the other girls who were on the canoe trip are also being collected. The others will have to stay, because their parents are in Europe, or cannot be reached.

Cappie is grim. They've tried to hush it up, but of course everyone in camp knows. Soon the papers will know too. You can't keep it quiet, but what can be said? What can be said that makes any sense? "Girl vanishes in broad daylight, without a trace." It can't be believed. Other things, worse things, will be suspected. Negligence, at the very least. But they have always taken such care. Bad luck will gather around Camp Manitou like a fog; parents will avoid it, in favour of other, luckier places. Lois can see Cappie thinking all this, even through her numbness. It's what anyone would think.

Lois sits on the hard wooden chair in Cappie's office, beside the old wooden desk, over which hangs the thumb-tacked bulletin board of normal camp routine, and gazes at Cappie through her puffy eyelids. Cappie is now smiling what is supposed to be a reassuring smile. Her manner is too casual: she's after something. Lois has seen this look on Cappie's face when she's been sniffing out contraband chocolate bars, hunting down those rumoured to have snuck out of their cabins at night.

"Tell me again," says Cappie, "from the beginning."

Lois has told her story so many times by now, to Pat and Kip, to Cappie, to the police, that she knows it word for word. She knows it, but she no longer believes it. It has become a story. "I told you," she said. "She wanted to go to the bathroom. I gave her my toilet paper. I went down the path, I waited for her. I heard this kind of shout . . ."

"Yes," says Cappie, smiling confidently, "but before that. What did you say to one another?"

Lois thinks. Nobody has asked her this before. "She said you could dive off there. She said it went straight down."

"And what did you say?"

"I said you'd have to be nuts."

"Were you mad at Lucy?" says Cappie, in an encouraging voice.

"No," says Lois. "Why would I be mad at Lucy? I wasn't ever mad at Lucy." She feels like crying again. The times when she has in fact been mad at Lucy have been erased already. Lucy was always perfect.

"Sometimes we're angry when we don't know we're angry," says Cappie, as if to herself. "Sometimes we get really mad and we don't even know it. Sometimes we might do a thing without meaning to, or without knowing what will happen. We lose our tempers."

Lois is only thirteen, but it doesn't take her long to figure out that Cappie is not including herself in any of this. By *we* she means Lois. She is accusing Lois of pushing Lucy off the cliff. The unfairness of this hits her like a slap. "I didn't!" she says.

"Didn't what?" says Cappie softly. "Didn't what, Lois?"

Lois does the worst thing, she begins to cry. Cappie gives her a look like a pounce. She's got what she wanted.

Later, when she was grown up, Lois was able to understand what this interview had been about. She could see Cappie's desperation, her need for a story, a real story with a reason in it; anything but the senseless vacancy Lucy had left for her to deal with. Cappie wanted Lois to supply the reason, to be the reason. It wasn't even for the newspapers or the parents, because she could never make such an accusation without proof. It was for herself: something to explain the loss of Camp Manitou and of all she had worked for, the years of entertaining spoiled children and buttering up parents and making a fool of herself with feathers stuck in her hair. Camp Manitou was in fact lost. It did not survive.

Lois worked all this out, twenty years later. But it was far too late. It was too late even ten minutes afterwards, when she'd left Cappie's office and was walking slowly back to her cabin to pack. Lucy's clothes were still there, folded on the shelves, as if waiting. She felt the other girls in the cabin watching her with speculation in their eyes. *Could she have done it? She must have done it.* For the rest of her life, she has caught people watching her in this way.

Maybe they weren't thinking this. Maybe they were merely sorry for her. But she felt she had been tried and sentenced, and this is what has stayed with her: the knowledge that she had been singled out, condemned for something that was not her fault.

Lois sits in the living room of her apartment, drinking a cup of tea. Through the knee-to-ceiling window she has a wide view of Lake Ontario, with its skin of wrinkled blue-grey light, and of the willows of Centre Island shaken by a wind, which is silent at this distance, and on this side of the glass. When there isn't too much pollution she can see the far shore, the foreign shore; though today it is obscured.

Possibly she could go out, go downstairs, do some shopping; there isn't much in the refrigerator. The boys say she doesn't get out enough. But she isn't hungry, and moving, stirring from this space, is increasingly an effort.

She can hardly remember, now, having her two boys in the hospital, nursing them as babies; she can hardly remember getting married, or what Rob looked like. Even at the time she never felt she was paying full attention. She was tired a lot, as if she was living not one life but two: her own, and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not let itself be realized—the life of what would have happened if Lucy had not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time.

She would never go up north, to Rob's family cottage or to any place with wild lakes and wild trees and the calls of loons. She would never go anywhere near. Still, it was as if she was always listening for another voice, the voice of a person who should have been there but was not. An echo.

While Rob was alive, while the boys were growing up, she could pretend she didn't hear it, this empty space in sound. But now there is nothing much left to distract her.

She turns away from the window and looks at her pictures. There is the pinkish island, in the lake, with the intertwined trees. It's the same landscape they paddled through, that distant summer. She's

seen travelogues of this country, aerial photographs; it looks different from above, bigger, more hopeless: lake after lake, random blue puddles in dark green bush, the trees like bristles.

How could you ever find anything there, once it was lost? Maybe if they cut it all down, drained it all away, they might find Lucy's bones, some time, wherever they are hidden. A few bones, some buttons, the buckle from her shorts.

But a dead person is a body; a body occupies space, it exists somewhere. You can see it; you put it in a box and bury it in the ground, and then it's in a box in the ground. But Lucy is not in a box, or in the ground. Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere.

And these paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren't any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path. There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. No matter how far back in you go, there will be more. And the trees themselves are hardly trees; they are currents of energy, charged with violent colour.

Who knows how many trees there were on the cliff just before Lucy disappeared? Who counted? Maybe there was one more, afterwards.

Lois sits in her chair and does not move. Her hand with the cup is raised halfway to her mouth. She hears something, almost hears it: a shout of recognition, or of joy.

She looks at the paintings, she looks into them. Every one of them is a picture of Lucy. You can't see her exactly, but she's there, in behind the pink stone island or the one behind that. In the picture of the cliff she is hidden by the clutch of fallen rocks towards the bottom, in the one of the river shore she is crouching beneath the overturned canoe. In the yellow autumn woods she's behind the tree

that cannot be seen because of the other trees, over beside the blue sliver of pond; but if you walked into the picture and found the tree, it would be the wrong one, because the right one would be further on.

Everyone has to be somewhere, and this is where Lucy is. She is in Lois's apartment, in the holes that open inwards on the wall, not like windows but like doors. She is here. She is entirely alive.

1991

Endnotes

- Note 1: Sofa.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2:
All Canadian landscape painters: Tom Thomson (1877–1917), A. Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Lawren Harris (1885–1970), Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), J. E. H. MacDonald (1873–1932), and David Milne (1882–1953). Jackson, Harris, Lismer, and MacDonald were members of the Group of Seven, the first major national movement in Canadian art, and Thomson was associated with the group. Its work was usually expressionist in style.
[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Enlarged masses of lymphoid tissue at the top of the throat, blocking the nasal passages.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: First-aid ointment.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Beads made from polished shells and used as money by Indigenous peoples of North America.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Early photographs.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Metal pail with a close-fitting lid and a wire handle, used for cooking over open fires.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Royal Canadian Mounted Police.[Return to reference 8](#)

Miss July Grows Older

How much longer can I get away
with being so fucking cute?
Not much longer.
The shoes with bows, the cunning underwear
with slogans on the crotch—*Knock Here*,
5 and so forth—
will have to go, along with the cat suit.¹
After a while you forget
what you really look like.
You think your mouth is the size it was.
10 You pretend not to care.

When I was young I went with my hair
hiding one eye, thinking myself daring;
off to the movies in my jaunty pencil
skirt and elastic cinch-belt,
15 chewed gum, left lipstick
imprints the shape of grateful, rubbery
sighs on the cigarettes of men
I hardly knew and didn't want to.
Men were a skill, you had to have
20 good hands, breathe into
their nostrils, as for horses. It was something I did
well,
like playing the flute, although I don't.

In the forests of grey stems there are standing
pools,
25 tarn-coloured,² choked with brown leaves.
Through them you can see an arm, a shoulder,
when the light is right, with the sky clouded.

The train goes past silos, through meadows,
the winter wheat on the fields like scanty fur.

30 I still get letters, although not many.
A man writes me, requesting true-life stories
about bad sex. He's doing an anthology.
He got my name off an old calendar,
the photo that's mostly bum and daisies,
35 back when my skin had the golden slick
of fresh-spread margarine.
Not rape, he says, but disappointment,
more like a defeat of expectations.
Dear Sir, I reply, I never had any.
Bad sex, that is.
40 It was never the sex, it was the other things,
the absence of flowers, the death threats,
the eating habits at breakfast.
I notice I'm using the past tense.

45 Though the vaporous cloud of chemicals that
enveloped you
like a glowing eggshell, an incense,
doesn't disappear: it just gets larger
and takes in more. You grow out
of sex like a shrunk dress
into your common senses, those you share
50 with whatever's listening. The way the sun
moves through the hours becomes important,
the smeared raindrops
on the window, buds
on the roadside weeds, the sheen
55 of spilled oil on a raw ditch
filling with muddy water.

Don't get me wrong: with the lights out
I'd still take on anyone,

60 if I had the energy to spare.
But after a while these flesh arpeggios get boring,
like Bach³ over and over;
too much of one kind of glory.

65 When I was all body I was lazy.
I had an easy life, and was not grateful.
Now there are more of me.
Don't confuse me with my hen-leg elbows:
what you get is no longer
what you see.

1995

Endnotes

- Note 1: Close-fitting jumpsuit, typically covering the body from the neck to the feet.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: That is, the color of a small mountain lake.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German composer. “Arpeggios”: the notes of a musical chord played in rapid succession.[Return to reference 3](#)

J. M. COETZEE

b. 1940

John Maxwell Coetzee was born in Cape Town, South Africa. His mother was a schoolteacher; his father, a lawyer who became a sheepherder after losing his job. When Coetzee was eight his family left the provinces, and he chronicles this and other parts of his childhood in third-person memoirs, *Boyhood: Scenes from a Provincial Life* (1997) and *Youth: Scenes from a Provincial Life II* (2002), followed up by a novelistic pseudo-biography of his adulthood, *Summertime* (2009). Coetzee was educated in Cape Town and then lived in London for a few years, working as a computer programmer, before earning his Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin, where he wrote a dissertation on the fiction of Samuel Beckett—a major influence, along with Kafka and Dostoyevsky, on Coetzee's fiction. He was appointed, first, assistant professor and, subsequently, Butler Professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. In 1984 he returned to South Africa as professor of general literature at the University of Cape Town, and since 2002 he has lived in Australia. Coetzee is the first novelist to win the prestigious Booker Prize twice, and in 2003 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The central concern of Coetzee's fiction—the oppressive nature of colonialism—made its appearance with his first book, *Dusklands* (1974). This consists of two novellas, one set in the U.S. State Department during the Vietnam War, the other in southern Africa

two hundred years earlier. The protagonists of these seemingly different stories—Eugene Dawn, an expert in psychological warfare, and Jacobus Coetzee, an explorer and pioneer—are engaged in similar projects, each leading to oppression and murder. Coetzee's subsequent novels include *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), a feminist anticolonial fable in the voice of a mad South African farmwoman; *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), about a homeless man trying to survive in war-torn Africa; *Foe* (1986), a retelling of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* from the perspective of a female castaway; *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), a fictionalized account of Dostoyevsky's life; and *Disgrace* (1999), about sexual harassment, rape, and race relations in post-apartheid South Africa. Coetzee published his first major works of the twenty-first century, including *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), and *Summertime* (2009), under the category of "fiction." Each was highly experimental in structure and deviated from the usual narratives and typographical modes of the novel. *Elizabeth Costello* unfolded as a series of lectures embedded within a fictional world, while *Diary* featured three narrative threads arranged in distinct sections across each page. *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), *The Schooldays of Jesus* (2016), and *The Death of Jesus* (2020) return to the allegorical mode of Coetzee's earlier novels, but with stronger core interests in religion and philosophy. His novel *The Pole* (2023) is his second to be published in Spanish translation (the first being *The Death of Jesus*) before appearing in an English-language edition. His many essays and works of criticism have concerned censorship, the rights of animals, translation, and South African history, among other themes.

Coetzee is at once a passionate political novelist and an intensely literary one, both qualities emerging in his most compelling indictment of colonialism, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). This novel takes its title and theme from a well-known poem by the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933), which ends (in Rae Dalven's translation):

. . . night is here but the barbarians have not come.

Some people arrived from the frontiers,
And they said that there are no longer any barbarians.
And now what shall become of us without any barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution.

In Coetzee's novel the rulers of the unnamed empire claim it is threatened by barbarians, but the barbarian threat is, at least in part, a fantasy concocted by the empire to hold itself together. The narrator is a magistrate in charge of a frontier post, poised uneasily between the harmless inhabitants of the region and the empire's ruthless officials, and unable to protect either the natives or himself from his brutal colleague, Colonel Joll. Imprisoned and stripped of his duties, the magistrate becomes increasingly skeptical of the empire's motives. When the imperial army arrives to subdue supposed insurgents, its vicious treatment of prisoners calls into question the relation of "civilization" to "barbarism" and demonstrates, in harrowing scenes of abuse and torture, the ethical dangers of one people's dominance over another. In this medley of realist particularism and allegorical parable, Coetzee leaves the landscape and time of the novel hauntingly unspecified, suggesting that colonialism's degradation and coercion, violence, and moral corruption can occur anywhere, at any time.

From Waiting for the Barbarians

First there is the sound of muskets far away, as diminutive as popguns.¹ Then from nearer by, from the ramparts themselves, come volleys of answering shots. There is a stampede of footsteps across the barracks yard. "The barbarians!" someone shouts; but I think he is wrong. Above all the clamour the great bell begins to peal.

Kneeling with an ear to the crack of the door I try to make out what is going on.

The noise from the square mounts from a hubbub to a steady roar in which no single voice can be distinguished. The whole town must be pouring out in welcome, thousands of ecstatic souls. Volleys of musket-shots keep cracking. Then the tenor of the roar changes, rises in pitch and excitement. Faintly above it come the brassy tones of bugles.

The temptation is too great. What have I to lose? I unlock the door. In glare so blinding that I must squint and shade my eyes, I cross the yard, pass through the gate, and join the rear of the crowd. The volleys and the roar of applause continue. The old woman in black beside me takes my arm to steady herself and stands on her toes. "Can you see?" she says. "Yes, I can see men on horseback," I reply; but she is not listening.

I can see a long file of horsemen who, amid flying banners, pass through the gateway and make their way to the centre of the square where they dismount. There is a cloud of dust over the whole square, but I see that they are smiling and laughing: one of them rides with his hands raised high in triumph, another waves a garland of flowers. They progress slowly, for the crowd presses around them, trying to touch them, throwing flowers, clapping their hands above their heads in joy, spinning round and round in private ecstasies. Children dive past me, scrambling through the legs of the

grownups to be nearer to their heroes. Fusillade after fusillade comes from the ramparts, which are lined with cheering people.

One part of the cavalcade does not dismount. Headed by a stern-faced young corporal bearing the green and gold banner of the battalion, it passes through the press of bodies to the far end of the square and then begins a circuit of the perimeter, the crowd surging slowly in its wake. The word runs like fire from neighbour to neighbour: "*Barbarians!*"

The standard-bearer's horse is led by a man who brandishes a heavy stick to clear his way. Behind him comes another trooper trailing a rope; and at the end of the rope, tied neck to neck, comes a file of men, barbarians, stark naked, holding their hands up to their faces in an odd way as though one and all are suffering from toothache. For a moment I am puzzled by the posture, by the tiptoeing eagerness with which they follow their leader, till I catch a glint of metal and at once comprehend. A simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks. "It makes them meek as lambs," I remember being told by a soldier who had once seen the trick: "they think of nothing but how to keep very still." My heart grows sick. I know now that I should not have left my cell.

I have to turn my back smartly to avoid being seen by the two who, with their mounted escort, bring up the rear of the procession: the bareheaded young captain whose first triumph this is, and at his shoulder, leaner and darker after his months of campaigning, Colonel of Police Joll.

The circuit is made, everyone has a chance to see the twelve miserable captives, to prove to his children that the barbarians are real. Now the crowd, myself reluctantly in its wake, flows towards the great gate, where a half-moon of soldiers blocks its way until, compressed at front and rear, it cannot budge.

"What is going on?" I ask my neighbour.

"I don't know," he says, "but help me to lift him." I help him to lift the child he carries on his arm on to his shoulders. "Can you see?" he asks the child.

"Yes."

"What are they doing?"

"They are making those barbarians kneel. What are they going to do to them?"

"I don't know. Let's wait and see."

Slowly, titanically, with all my might, I turn and begin to squeeze my body out, "Excuse me . . . excuse me . . ." I say: "the heat—I'm going to be sick." For the first time I see heads turn, fingers point.

I ought to go back to my cell. As a gesture it will have no effect, it will not even be noticed. Nevertheless, for my own sake, as a gesture to myself alone, I ought to return to the cool dark and lock the door and bend the key and stop my ears to the noise of patriotic bloodlust and close my lips and never speak again. Who knows, perhaps I do my fellow-townsmen an injustice, perhaps at this very minute the shoemaker is at home tapping on his last, humming to himself to drown the shouting, perhaps there are housewives shelling peas in their kitchens, telling stories to occupy their restless children, perhaps there are farmers still going calmly about the repair of the ditches. If comrades like these exist, what a pity I do not know them! For me, at this moment, striding away from the crowd, what has become important above all is that I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed nor poison myself with impotent hatred of its perpetrators. I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself. Let it at the very least be said, if it ever comes to be said, if there is ever anyone in some remote future interested to know the way we lived, that in this farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian.

I pass through the barracks gate into my prison yard. At the trough in the middle of the yard I pick up an empty bucket and fill it. With the bucket held up before me, slopping water over its sides, I approach the rear of the crowd again. "Excuse me," I say, and push. People curse me, give way, the bucket tilts and splashes, I forge forward till in a minute I am suddenly clear in the frontmost rank of

the crowd behind the backs of the soldiers who, holding staves between them, keep an arena clear for the exemplary spectacle.

Four of the prisoners kneel on the ground. The other eight, still roped together, squat in the shade of the wall watching, their hands to their cheeks.

The kneeling prisoners bend side by side over a long heavy pole. A cord runs from the loop of wire through the first man's mouth, under the pole, up to the second man's loop, back under the pole, up to the third loop, under the pole, through the fourth loop. As I watch a soldier slowly pulls the cord tighter and the prisoners bend further till finally they are kneeling with their faces touching the pole. One of them writhes his shoulders in pain and moans. The others are silent, their thoughts wholly concentrated on moving smoothly with the cord, not giving the wire a chance to tear their flesh.

Directing the soldier with little gestures of the hand is Colonel Joll. Though I am only one in a crowd of thousands, though his eyes are shaded as ever, I stare at him so hard with a face so luminous with query that I know at once he sees me.

Behind me I distinctly hear the word *magistrate*. Do I imagine it or are my neighbours inching away from me?

The Colonel steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal. I read the words upside down: *ENEMY . . . ENEMY . . . ENEMY . . . ENEMY*. He steps back and folds his hands. At a distance of no more than twenty paces he and I contemplate each other.

Then the beating begins. The soldiers use the stout green cane staves, bringing them down with the heavy slapping sounds of washing-paddles, raising red welts on the prisoners' backs and buttocks. With slow care the prisoners extend their legs until they lie flat on their bellies, all except the one who had been moaning and who now gasps with each blow.

The black charcoal and ochre dust begin to run with sweat and blood. The game, I see, is to beat them till their backs are washed

clean.

I watch the face of a little girl who stands in the front rank of the crowd gripping her mother's clothes. Her eyes are round, her thumb is in her mouth: silent, terrified, curious, she drinks in the sight of these big naked men being beaten. On every face around me, even those that are smiling, I see the same expression: not hatred, not bloodlust, but a curiosity so intense that their bodies are drained by it and only their eyes live, organs of a new and ravening appetite.

The soldiers doing the beating grow tired. One stands with his hands on his hips panting, smiling, gesturing to the crowd. There is a word from the Colonel: all four of them cease their labour and come forward offering their canes to the spectators.

A girl, giggling and hiding her face, is pushed forward by her friends. "Go on, don't be afraid!" they urge her. A soldier puts a cane in her hand and leads her to the place. She stands confused, embarrassed, one hand still over her face. Shouts, jokes, obscene advice are hurled at her. She lifts the cane, brings it down smartly on the prisoner's buttocks, drops it, and scuttles to safety to a roar of applause.

There is a scramble for the canes, the soldiers can barely keep order, I lose sight of the prisoners on the ground as people press forward to take a turn or simply watch the beating from nearer. I stand forgotten with my bucket between my feet.

Then the flogging is over, the soldiers reassert themselves, the crowd scrambles back, the arena is reconstituted, though narrower than before.

Over his head, exhibiting it to the crowd, Colonel Joll holds a hammer, an ordinary four-pound hammer used for knocking in tent-pegs. Again his gaze meets mine. The babble subsides.

"No!" I hear the first word from my throat, rusty, not loud enough. Then again: "No!" This time the word rings like a bell from my chest. The soldier who blocks my way stumbles aside. I am in the arena holding up my hands to still the crowd: "No! No! No!"

When I turn to Colonel Joll he is standing not five paces from me, his arms folded. I point a finger at him. "You!" I shout. Let it all

be said. Let him be the one on whom the anger breaks. "You are depraving these people!"

He does not flinch, he does not reply.

"*You!*" My arm points at him like a gun. My voice fills the square. There is utter silence; or perhaps I am too intoxicated to hear.

Something crashes into me from behind. I sprawl in the dust, gasp, feel the sear of old pain in my back. A stick thuds down on me. Reaching out to ward it off, I take a withering blow on my hand.

It becomes important to stand up, however difficult the pain makes it. I come to my feet and see who it is that is hitting me. It is the stocky man with the sergeant's stripes who helped with the beatings. Crouched at the knees, his nostrils flaring, he stands with his stick raised for the next blow. "Wait!" I gasp, holding out my limp hand. "I think you have broken it!" He strikes, and I take the blow on the forearm. I hide my arm, lower my head, and try to grope towards him and grapple. Blows fall on my head and shoulders. Never mind: all I want is a few moments to finish what I am saying now that I have begun. I grip his tunic and hug him to me. Though he wrestles, he cannot use his stick; over his shoulder I shout again.

"Not with that!" I shout. The hammer lies cradled in the Colonel's folded arms. "You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast!" In a terrible surge of rage I turn on the sergeant and hurl him from me. Godlike strength is mine. In a minute it will pass: let me use it well while it lasts! "Look!" I shout. I point to the four prisoners who lie docilely on the earth, their lips to the pole, their hands clasped to their faces like monkeys' paws, oblivious of the hammer, ignorant of what is going on behind them, relieved that the offending mark has been beaten from their backs, hoping that the punishment is at an end. I raise my broken hand to the sky. "Look!" I shout. "We are the great miracle of creation! But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself! How—!" Words fail me. "Look at these men!" I recommence. "*Men!*" Those in the crowd who can crane to look at the prisoners, even at the flies that begin to settle on their bleeding welts.

I hear the blow coming and turn to meet it. It catches me full across the face. "I am blind!" I think, staggering back into the blackness that instantly falls. I swallow blood; something blooms across my face, starting as a rosy warmth, turning to fiery agony. I hide my face in my hands and stamp around in a circle trying not to shout, trying not to fall.

What I wanted to say next I cannot remember. A miracle of creation—I pursue the thought but it eludes me like a wisp of smoke. It occurs to me that we crush insects beneath our feet, miracles of creation too, beetles, worms, cockroaches, ants, in their various ways.

I take my fingers from my eyes and a grey world re-emerges swimming in tears. I am so profoundly grateful that I cease to feel pain. As I am hustled, a man at each elbow, back through the murmuring crowd to my cell, I even find myself smiling.

That smile, that flush of joy, leave behind a disturbing residue. I know that they commit an error in treating me so summarily. For I am no orator. What would I have said if they had let me go on? That it is worse to beat a man's feet to pulp than to kill him in combat? That it brings shame on everyone when a girl is permitted to flog a man? That spectacles of cruelty corrupt the hearts of the innocent? The words they stopped me from uttering may have been very paltry indeed, hardly words to rouse the rabble. What, after all, do I stand for besides an archaic code of gentlemanly behaviour towards captured foes, and what do I stand against except the new science of degradation that kills people on their knees, confused and disgraced in their own eyes? Would I have dared to face the crowd to demand justice for these ridiculous barbarian prisoners with their backsides in the air? *Justice*: once that word is uttered, where will it all end? Easier to shout *No!* Easier to be beaten and made a martyr. Easier to lay my head on a block than to defend the cause of justice for the barbarians: for where can that argument lead but to laying down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped? The old magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and

imprisoned, impregnably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt.

My nose is broken, I know, and perhaps also the cheekbone where the flesh was laid open by the blow of the stick. My left eye is swelling shut.

As the numbness wears off the pain begins to come in spasms a minute or two apart so intense that I can no longer lie still. At the height of the spasm I trot around the room holding my face, whining like a dog; in the blessed valleys between the peaks I breathe deeply, trying to keep control of myself, trying not to make too disgraceful an outcry. I seem to hear surges and lulls in the noise from the mob on the square but cannot be sure that the roar is not simply in my eardrums.

They bring me my evening meal as usual but I cannot eat. I cannot keep still, I have to walk back and forth or rock on my haunches to keep myself from screaming, tearing my clothes, clawing my flesh, doing whatever people do when the limit of their endurance is reached. I weep, and feel the tears stinging the open flesh. I hum the old song about the rider and the juniper bush over and over again, clinging to the remembered words even after they have ceased to make any sense. One, two, three, four . . . I count. It will be a famous victory, I tell myself, if you can last the night.

In the early hours of the morning, when I am so giddy with exhaustion that I reel on my feet, I finally give way and sob from the heart like a child: I sit in a corner against the wall and weep, the tears running from my eyes without stop. I weep and weep while the throbbing comes and goes according to its own cycles. In this position sleep bursts upon me like a thunderbolt. I am amazed to come to myself in the thin grey light of day, slumped in a corner, with not the faintest sense that time has passed. Though the throbbing is still there I find I can endure it if I remain still. Indeed, it has lost its strangeness. Soon, perhaps, it will be as much part of me as breathing.

So I lie quietly against the wall, folding my sore hand under my armpit for comfort, and fall into a second sleep, into a confusion of

images among which I search out one in particular, brushing aside the others that fly at me like leaves. It is of the girl. She is kneeling with her back to me before the snow-castle or sandcastle she has built. She wears a dark blue robe. As I approach I see that she is digging away in the bowels of the castle.

She becomes aware of me and turns. I am mistaken, it is not a castle she has built but a clay oven. Smoke curls up from the vent at the back. She holds out her hands to me offering me something, a shapeless lump which I peer at unwillingly through a mist. Though I shake my head my vision will not clear.

She is wearing a round cap embroidered in gold. Her hair is braided in a heavy plait which lies over her shoulder: there is gold thread worked into the braid. "Why are you dressed in your best?" I want to say: "I have never seen you looking so lovely." She smiles at me: what beautiful teeth she has, what clear jet-black eyes! Also now I can see that what she is holding out to me is a loaf of bread, still hot, with a coarse steaming broken crust. A surge of gratitude sweeps through me. "Where did a child like you learn to bake so well in the desert?" I want to say. I open my arms to embrace her, and come to myself with tears stinging the wound on my cheek. Though I scrabble back at once into the burrow of sleep I cannot re-enter the dream or taste the bread that has made my saliva run.

• •

Colonel Joll sits behind the desk in my office. There are no books or files; the room is starkly empty save for a vase of fresh flowers.

The handsome warrant officer whose name I do not know lifts the cedar-wood chest on to the desk and steps back.

Looking down to refer to his papers, the Colonel speaks. "Among the items found in your apartment was this wooden chest. I would like you to consider it. Its contents are unusual. It contains approximately three hundred slips of white poplar-wood, each about eight inches by two inches, many of them wound about with lengths

of string.² The wood is dry and brittle. Some of the string is new, some so old that it has perished.

"If one loosens the string one finds that the slip splits open revealing two flat inner surfaces. These surfaces are written on in an unfamiliar script.

"I think you will concur with this description."

I stare into the black lenses. He goes on.

"A reasonable inference is that the wooden slips contain messages passed between yourself and other parties, we do not know when. It remains for you to explain what the messages say and who the other parties were."

He takes a slip from the chest and flicks it across the polished surface of the desk towards me.

I look at the lines of characters written by a stranger long since dead. I do not even know whether to read from right to left or from left to right. In the long evenings I spent poring over my collection I isolated over four hundred different characters in the script, perhaps as many as four hundred and fifty. I have no idea what they stand for. Does each stand for a single thing, a circle for the sun, a triangle for a woman, a wave for a lake; or does a circle merely stand for "circle", a triangle for "triangle", a wave for "wave"? Does each sign represent a different state of the tongue, the lips, the throat, the lungs, as they combine in the uttering of some multifarious unimaginable extinct barbarian language? Or are my four hundred characters nothing but scribal embellishments of an underlying repertory of twenty or thirty whose primitive forms I am too stupid to see?

"He sends greetings to his daughter," I say. I hear with surprise the thick nasal voice that is now mine. My finger runs along the line of characters from right to left. "Whom he says he has not seen for a long time. He hopes she is happy and thriving. He hopes the lambing season has been good. He has a gift for her, he says, which he will keep till he sees her again. He sends his love. It is not easy to read his signature. It could be simply 'Your father' or it could be something else, a name."

I reach over into the chest and pick out a second slip. The warrant officer, who sits behind Joll with a little notebook open on his knee, stares hard at me, his pencil poised above the paper.

"This one reads as follows," I say: " 'I am sorry I must send bad news. The soldiers came and took your brother away. I have been to the fort every day to plead for his return. I sit in the dust with my head bare. Yesterday for the first time they sent a man to speak to me. He says your brother is no longer here. He says he has been sent away. "Where?" I asked, but he would not say. Do not tell your mother, but join me in praying for his safety.'

"And now let us see what this next one says." The pencil is still poised, he has not written anything, he has not stirred. " 'We went to fetch your brother yesterday. They showed us into a room where he lay on a table sewn up in a sheet.' " Slowly Joll leans back in his chair. The warrant officer closes his notebook and half-rises; but with a gesture Joll restrains him. " 'They wanted me to take him away like that, but I insisted on looking first. "What if it is the wrong body you are giving me?" I said—"You have so many bodies here, bodies of brave young men." So I opened the sheet and saw that it was indeed he. Through each eyelid, I saw that there was a stitch, "Why have you done that?" I said. "It is our custom," he said. I tore the sheet wide open and saw bruises all over his body, and saw that his feet were swollen and broken. "What happened to him?" I said. "I do not know," said the man, "it is not on the paper; if you have questions you must go to the sergeant, but he is very busy." We have had to bury your brother here, outside their fort, because he was beginning to stink. Please tell your mother and try to console her.'

"Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning.

"It is the same with the rest of these slips." I plunge my good hand into the chest and stir. "They form an allegory. They can be

read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire—the old Empire, I mean. There is no agreement among scholars about how to interpret these relics of the ancient barbarians. Allegorical sets like this one can be found buried all over the desert. I found this one not three miles from here in the ruins of a public building. Graveyards are another good place to look in, though it is not always easy to tell where barbarian burial sites lie. It is recommended that you simply dig at random: perhaps at the very spot where you stand you will come upon scraps, shards, reminders of the dead. Also the air: the air is full of sighs and cries. These are never lost: if you listen carefully, with a sympathetic ear, you can hear them echoing forever within the second sphere. The night is best: sometimes when you have difficulty in falling asleep it is because your ears have been reached by the cries of the dead which, like their writings, are open to many interpretations.

“Thank you. I have finished translating.”

I have not failed to keep an eye on Joll through all this. He has not stirred again, save to lay a hand on his subordinate’s sleeve at the moment when I referred to the Empire and he rose, ready to strike me.

If he comes near me I will hit him with all the strength in my body. I will not disappear into the earth without leaving my mark on them.

The Colonel speaks. “You have no idea how tiresome your behaviour is. You are the one and only official we have had to work with on the frontier who has not given us his fullest co-operation. Candidly, I must tell you I am not interested in these sticks.” He waves a hand at the slips scattered on the desk. “They are very likely gambling-sticks. I know that other tribes on the border gamble with sticks.

“I ask you to consider soberly: what kind of future do you have here? You cannot be allowed to remain in your post. You have

utterly disgraced yourself. Even if you are not eventually prosecuted —”

“I am waiting for you to prosecute me!” I shout. “When are you going to do it? When are you going to bring me to trial? When am I going to have a chance to defend myself?” I am in a fury. None of the speechlessness I felt in front of the crowd afflicts me. If I were to confront these men now, in public, in a fair trial, I would find the words to shame them. It is a matter of health and strength: I feel my hot words swell in my breast. But they will never bring a man to trial while he is healthy and strong enough to confound them. They will shut me away in the dark till I am a muttering idiot, a ghost of myself; then they will haul me before a closed court and in five minutes dispose of the legalities they find so tiresome.

“For the duration of the emergency, as you know,” says the Colonel, “the administration of justice is out of the hands of civilians and in the hands of the Bureau.” He sighs. “Magistrate, you seem to believe that we do not dare to bring you to trial because we fear you are too popular a figure in this town. I do not think you are aware of how much you forfeited by neglecting your duties, shunning your friends, keeping company with low people. There is no one I have spoken to who has not at some time felt insulted by your behaviour.”

“My private life is none of their business!”

“Nevertheless, I may tell you that our decision to relieve you of your duties has been welcomed in most quarters. Personally I have nothing against you. When I arrived back a few days ago, I had decided that all I wanted from you was a clear answer to a simple question, after which you could have returned to your concubines a free man.”

It strikes me suddenly that the insult may not be gratuitous, that perhaps for different reasons these two men might welcome it if I lost my temper. Burning with outrage, tense in every muscle, I guard my silence.

“However, you seem to have a new ambition,” he goes on. “You seem to want to make a name for yourself as the One Just Man, the man who is prepared to sacrifice his freedom to his principles.

"But let me ask you: do you believe that that is how your fellow-citizens see you after the ridiculous spectacle you created on the square the other day? Believe me, to people in this town you are not the One Just Man, you are simply a clown, a madman. You are dirty, you stink, they can smell you a mile away. You look like an old beggar-man, a refuse-scavenger. They do not want you back in any capacity. You have no future here.

"You want to go down in history as a martyr, I suspect. But who is going to put you in the history books? These border troubles are of no significance. In a while they will pass and the frontier will go to sleep for another twenty years. People are not interested in the history of the back of beyond."

"There were no border troubles before you came," I say.

"That is nonsense," he says. "You are simply ignorant of the facts. You are living in a world of the past. You think we are dealing with small groups of peaceful nomads. In fact we are dealing with a well organized enemy. If you had travelled with the expeditionary force you would have seen that for yourself."

"Those pitiable prisoners you brought in—are *they* the enemy I must fear? Is that what you say? *You* are the enemy, Colonel!" I can restrain myself no longer. I pound the desk with my fist. "*You* are the enemy, *you* have made the war, and *you* have given them all the martyrs they need—starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here! History will bear me out!"

"Nonsense. There will be no history, the affair is too trivial." He seems impassive, but I am sure I have shaken him.

"You are an obscene torturer! You deserve to hang!"

"Thus speaks the judge, the One Just Man," he murmurs.

We stare into each other's eyes.

"Now," he says, squaring the papers before him: "I would like a statement on everything that passed between you and the barbarians on your recent and unauthorized visit to them."

"I refuse."

"Very well. Our interview is over." He turns to his subordinate. "He is your responsibility." He stands up, walks out. I face the

warrant officer.

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The wound on my cheek, never washed or dressed, is swollen and inflamed. A crust like a fat caterpillar has formed on it. My left eye is a mere slit, my nose a shapeless throbbing lump. I must breathe through my mouth.

I lie in the reek of old vomit obsessed with the thought of water. I have had nothing to drink for two days.

In my suffering there is nothing ennobling. Little of what I call suffering is even pain. What I am made to undergo is subjection to the most rudimentary needs of my body: to drink, to relieve itself, to find the posture in which it is least sore. When Warrant Officer Mandel and his man first brought me back here and lit the lamp and closed the door, I wondered how much pain a plump comfortable old man would be able to endure in the name of his eccentric notions of how the Empire should conduct itself. But my torturers were not interested in degrees of pain. They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself. They did not come to force the story out of me of what I had said to the barbarians and what the barbarians had said to me. So I had no chance to throw the high-sounding words I had ready in their faces. They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal.

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Nor is it a question of who endures longest. I used to think to myself, "They are sitting in another room discussing me. They are

saying to each other, 'How much longer before he grovels? In an hour we will go back and see.' "

But it is not like that. They have no elaborated system of pain and deprivation to which they subject me. For two days I go without food and water. On the third day I am fed. "I am sorry," says the man who brings my food, "we forgot." It is not malice that makes them forget. My torturers have their own lives to lead. I am not the centre of their universe. Mandel's underling probably spends his days counting bags in the commissary or patrolling the earthworks, grumbling to himself about the heat. Mandel himself, I am sure, spends more time polishing his straps and buckles than he spends on me. When the mood takes him he comes and gives me a lesson in humanity. How long can I withstand the randomness of their attacks? And what will happen if I succumb, weep, grovel, while yet the attacks go on?

• •

They call me into the yard. I stand before them hiding my nakedness, nursing my sore hand, a tired old bear made tame by too much baiting. "Run," Mandel says. I run around the yard under the blazing sun. When I slacken he slaps me on the buttocks with his cane and I trot faster. The soldiers leave their siesta and watch from the shade, the scullery maids hang over the kitchen door, children stare through the bars of the gate. "I cannot!" I gasp. "My heart!" I stop, hang my head, clutch my chest. Everyone waits patiently while I recover myself. Then the cane prods me and I shamble on, moving no faster than a man walks.

Or else I do tricks for them. They stretch a rope at knee-height and I jump back and forth over it. They call the cook's little grandson over and give him one end to hold. "Keep it steady," they say, "we don't want him to trip." The child grips his end of the rope with both hands, concentrating on this important task, waiting for me to jump. I baulk. The point of the cane finds its way between my buttocks and prods. "Jump," Mandel murmurs. I run, make a little skip,

blunder into the rope, and stand there. I smell of shit. I am not permitted to wash. The flies follow me everywhere, circling around the appetizing sore on my cheek, alighting if I stand still for a moment. The looping movement of my hand before my face to chase them away has become as automatic as the flick of a cow's tail. "Tell him he must do better next time," Mandel says to the boy. The boy smiles and looks away. I sit down in the dust to wait for the next trick. "Do you know how to skip?" he says to the boy. "Give the rope to the man and ask him to show you how to skip." I skip.

It cost me agonies of shame the first time I had to come out of my den and stand naked before these idlers or jerk my body about for their amusement. Now I am past shame. My mind is turned wholly to the menace of the moment when my knees turn to water or my heart grips me like a crab and I have to stand still; and each time I discover with surprise that after a little rest, after the application of a little pain, I can be made to move, to jump or skip or crawl or run a little further. Is there a point at which I will lie down and say, "Kill me—I would rather die than go on"? Sometimes I think I am approaching that point, but I am always mistaken.

There is no consoling grandeur in any of this. When I wake up groaning in the night it is because I am reliving in dreams the pettiest degradations. There is no way of dying allowed me, it seems, except like a dog in a corner.

• •

Then one day they throw open the door and I step out to face not two men but a squad standing to attention. "Here," says Mandel, and hands me a woman's calico smock. "Put it on."

"Why?"

"Very well, if you want to go naked, go naked."

I slip the smock over my head. It reaches halfway down my thighs. I catch a glimpse of the two youngest maids ducking back into the kitchen, dissolving in giggles.

My wrists are caught behind my back and tied. "The time has come, Magistrate," Mandel whispers in my ear. "Do your best to behave like a man." I am sure I can smell liquor on his breath.

They march me out of the yard. Under the mulberry trees, where the earth is purple with the juice of fallen berries, there is a knot of people waiting. Children are scrambling about on the branches. As I approach everyone falls silent.

A soldier tosses up the end of a new white hemp rope; one of the children in the tree catches it, loops it over a branch, and drops it back.

I know this is only a trick, a new way of passing the afternoon for men bored with the old torments. Nevertheless my bowels turn to water. "Where is the Colonel?" I whisper. No one pays any heed.

"Do you want to say something?" says Mandel. "Say whatever you wish. We give you this opportunity."

I look into his clear blue eyes, as clear as if there were crystal lenses slipped over his eyeballs. He looks back at me. I have no idea what he sees. Thinking of him, I have said the words *torture ... torturer* to myself, but they are strange words, and the more I repeat them the more strange they grow, till they lie like stones on my tongue. Perhaps this man, and the man he brings along to help him with his work, and their Colonel, are torturers, perhaps that is their designation on three cards in a pay-office somewhere in the capital, though it is more likely that the cards call them security officers. But when I look at him I see simply the clear blue eyes, the rather rigid good looks, the teeth slightly too long where the gums are receding. He deals with my soul: every day he folds the flesh aside and exposes my soul to the light; he has probably seen many souls in the course of his working life; but the care of souls seems to have left no more mark on him than the care of hearts leaves on the surgeon.

"I am trying very hard to understand your feelings towards me," I say. I cannot help mumbling, my voice is unsteady, I am afraid and the sweat is dripping from me. "Much more than an opportunity to address these people, to whom I have nothing to say, would I

appreciate a few words from you. So that I can come to understand why you devote yourself to this work. And can hear what you feel towards me, whom you have hurt a great deal and now seem to be proposing to kill."

Amazed I stare at this elaborate utterance as it winds its way out of me. Am I mad enough to intend a provocation?

"Do you see this hand?" he says. He holds his hand an inch from my face. "When I was younger"—he flexes the fingers—"I used to be able to poke this finger"—he holds up the index finger—"through a pumpkin-shell." He puts the tip of his finger against my forehead and presses. I take a step backwards.

They even have a cap ready for me, a salt-bag which they slip over my head and tie around my throat with a string. Through the mesh I watch them bring up the ladder and prop it against the branch. I am guided to it, my foot is set on the lowest rung, the noose is settled under my ear. "Now climb," says Mandel.

I turn my head and see two dim figures holding the end of the rope. "I can't climb with my hands tied," I say. My heart is hammering. "Climb," he says, steadying me by the arm. The rope tightens. "Keep it tight," he orders.

I climb, he climbs behind me, guiding me. I count ten rungs. Leaves brush against me. I stop. He grips my arm tighter. "Do you think we are playing?" he says. He talks through clenched teeth in a fury I do not understand. "Do you think I don't mean what I say?"

My eyes sting with sweat inside the bag. "No," I say, "I do not think you are playing." As long as the rope remains taut I know they are playing. If the rope goes slack, and I slip, I will die.

"Then what do you want to say to me?"

"I want to say that nothing passed between myself and the barbarians concerning military matters. It was a private affair. I went to return the girl to her family. For no other purpose."

"Is that all you want to say to me?"

"I want to say that no one deserves to die." In my absurd frock and bag, with the nausea of cowardice in my mouth, I say: "I want

to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what."

"That isn't enough." He lets my arm go. I teeter on my tenth rung, the rope saving my balance. "Do you see?" he says. He retreats down the ladder, leaving me alone.

Not sweat but tears.

There is a rustling in the leaves near me. A child's voice: "Can you see, uncle?"

"No."

"Hey, monkeys, come down!" calls someone from below. Through the taut rope I can feel the vibration of their movements in the branches.

So I stand for a long while, balancing carefully on the rung, feeling the comfort of the wood in the curve of my sole, trying not to waver, keeping the tension of the rope as constant as possible.

How long will a crowd of idlers be content to watch a man stand on a ladder? I would stand here till the flesh dropped from my bones, through storm and hail and flood, to live.

But now the rope tightens, I can even hear it rasp as it passes over the bark, till I must stretch to keep it from throttling me.

This is not a contest of patience, then: if the crowd is not satisfied the rules are changed. But of what use is it to blame the crowd? A scapegoat is named, a festival is declared, the laws are suspended: who would not flock to see the entertainment? What is it I object to in these spectacles of abasement and suffering and death that our new regime puts on but their lack of decorum? What will my own administration be remembered for besides moving the shambles from the marketplace to the outskirts of the town twenty years ago in the interests of decency? I try to call out something, a word of blind fear, a shriek, but the rope is now so tight that I am strangled, speechless. The blood hammers in my ears. I feel my toes lose their hold. I am swinging gently in the air, bumping against the ladder, flailing with my feet. The drumbeat in my ears becomes slower and louder till it is all I can hear.

I am standing in front of the old man, screwing up my eyes against the wind, waiting for him to speak. The ancient gun still rests between his horse's ears, but it is not aimed at me. I am aware of the vastness of the sky all around us, and of the desert.

I watch his lips. At any moment now he will speak: I must listen carefully to capture every syllable, so that later, repeating them to myself, poring over them, I can discover the answer to a question which for the moment has flown like a bird from my recollection.

I can see every hair of the horse's mane, every wrinkle of the old man's face, every rock and furrow of the hillside.

The girl, with her black hair braided and hanging over her shoulder in barbarian fashion, sits her horse behind him. Her head is bowed, she too is waiting for him to speak.

I sigh. "What a pity," I think. "It is too late now."

I am swinging loose. The breeze lifts my smock and plays with my naked body. I am relaxed, floating. In a woman's clothes.

What must be my feet touch the ground, though they are numb to all feeling. I stretch myself out carefully, at full length, light as a leaf. Whatever it is that has held my head so tightly slackens its grip. From inside me comes a ponderous grating. I breathe. All is well.

Then the hood comes off, the sun dazzles my eyes, I am hauled to my feet, everything swims before me, I go blank.

The word *flying* whispers itself somewhere at the edge of my consciousness. Yes, it is true, I have been flying.

I am looking into the blue eyes of Mandel. His lips move but I hear no words. I shake my head, and having once started find that I cannot stop.

"I was saying," he says, "*now we will show you another form of flying.*"

"He can't hear you," someone says. "He can hear," says Mandel. He slips the noose from my neck and knots it around the cord that binds my wrists. "Pull him up."

If I can hold my arms stiff, if I am acrobat enough to swing a foot up and hook it around the rope, I will be able to hang upside down and not be hurt: that is my last thought before they begin to

hoist me. But I am as weak as a baby, my arms come up behind my back, and as my feet leave the ground I feel a terrible tearing in my shoulders as though whole sheets of muscle are giving way. From my throat comes the first mournful dry bellow, like the pouring of gravel. Two little boys drop out of the tree and, hand in hand, not looking back, trot off. I bellow again and again, there is nothing I can do to stop it, the noise comes out of a body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair and roars its fright. Even if all the children of the town should hear me I cannot stop myself: let us only pray that they do not imitate their elders' games, or tomorrow there will be a plague of little bodies dangling from the trees. Someone gives me a push and I begin to float back and forth in an arc a foot above the ground like a great old moth with its wings pinched together, roaring, shouting. "He is calling his barbarian friends," someone observes. "That is barbarian language you hear." There is laughter.

1980

Endnotes

- Note 1: The magistrate, narrator of the novel, listens from the prison in which the empire has incarcerated him.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Over the years the magistrate has conducted archaeological digs outside the city, unearthing these poplar slips and other artifacts.[Return to reference 2](#)

EAVAN BOLAND

1944–2020

Eavan Boland was born in Dublin, the youngest daughter of an Irish diplomat and a painter, but as recalled in “Fond Memory” and other poems, she was displaced as a six-year-old from Ireland to London, where her father was Irish ambassador, and then to New York, where he was his country’s representative at the United Nations, before finally returning to Ireland in adolescence. She attended convent schools in these various locations. In Ireland she studied—and then taught—English at Trinity College, Dublin, and following that she taught at University College, the University of Iowa, and Stanford University.

Boland said in a 1994 lecture, “I am an Irish poet. A woman poet. In the first category I enter the tradition of the English language at an angle. In the second, I enter my own tradition at an even more steep angle.” The great puzzle of Boland’s career was how to embrace Irish identity while rejecting certain male-centered assumptions that have long dominated Irish literary culture. For Boland as a young woman writer, the frozen, mythical images of the Irish nation as an idealized woman—Mother Ireland, Dark Rosaleen, Cathleen Ni Houlihan—were inhibiting and insufficient. To bring into Irish verse a national narrative, a “herstory” that interweaves private life and public life, Boland seized on an alternative tradition to that of Irish male poets—namely, the example of American women poets such as Sylvia Plath and Adrienne Rich. Her eye for symbolic detail,

her ear for musical structure, her use of form to mirror content served her well in her effort to recover and vivify Irish women's historical experiences, including domestic labor, motherhood, famine, prostitution, and emigration.

Fond Memory

It was a school where all the children wore darned
worsted;⁰
where they cried—or almost all—when the Reverend
Mother
announced at lunch-time that the King¹ had died
peacefully in his sleep. I dressed in wool as well,
ate rationed food, played English games and learned
5 how wise the Magna Carta was, how hard the
Hanoverians²
had tried, the measure and complexity of verse,
the hum and score of the whole orchestra.
At three-o'clock I caught two buses home
10 where sometimes in the late afternoon
at a piano pushed into a corner of the playroom
my father would sit down and play the slow
lilts of Tom Moore³ while I stood there trying
not to weep at the cigarette smoke stinging up
from between his fingers and—as much as I could
15 think—
I thought this is my country, was, will be again,
this upward-straining song made to be
our safe inventory of pain. And I was wrong.

1987

Endnotes

- Note 1: King George VI of the United Kingdom died in 1952. Boland's father was a diplomat, and she spent much of her childhood in London.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Family of English monarchs who reigned from 1714 to 1901. "Magna Carta": charter of English liberties granted by King John in 1215.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Irish poet and singer (1779–1852).[Return to reference 3](#)

Notes

- °: *woolen fabric*[Return to reference °](#)

The Dolls Museum in Dublin

The wounds are terrible. The paint is old.
The cracks along the lips and on the cheeks
cannot be fixed. The cotton lawn¹ is soiled.
The arms are ivory dissolved to wax.

5 Recall the Quadrille.² Hum the waltz.
Promenade on the yacht-club terraces.
Put back the lamps in their copper holders,
the carriage wheels on the cobbled quays.

And recreate Easter in Dublin.³
10 Booted officers. Their mistresses.
Sunlight criss-crossing College Green.
Steam hissing from the flanks of horses.

Here they are. Cradled and cleaned,
held close in the arms of their owners.
15 Their cold hands clasped by warm hands,
their faces memorized like perfect manners.

The altars are mannerly with linen.
The lilies are whiter than surplices.⁴
The candles are burning and warning:
20 Rejoice, they whisper. After sacrifice.

Horse-chestnuts hold up their candles.
The Green is vivid with parasols.
Sunlight is pastel and windless.
The bar of the Shelbourne⁵ is full.

Laughter and gossip on the terraces.

25 Rumour and alarm at the barracks.
The Empire is summoning its officers.
The carriages are turning: they are turning back.

30 Past children walking with governesses,
Looking down, cossetting their dolls,
then looking up as the carriage passes,
the shadow chilling them. Twilight falls.

35 It is twilight in the dolls' museum. Shadows
remain on the parchment-coloured waists,
are bruises on the stitched cotton clothes,
are hidden in the dimples on the wrists.

40 The eyes are wide. They cannot address
the helplessness which has lingered in
the airless peace of each glass case:
to have survived. To have been stronger than
a moment. To be the hostages ignorance
takes from time and ornament from destiny. Both.
To be the present of the past. To infer the difference
with a terrible stare. But not feel it. And not know it.

1994

Endnotes

- Note 1: Usually fine linen, but also, as here, fine cotton.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A square dance and the music for it.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: What became known as the "Easter Rising" began on Easter Monday, 1916, when over sixteen hundred Irish nationalists seized key points in Dublin and an Irish Republic

was proclaimed from the General Post Office. See W. B. Yeats's "Easter, 1916" (p. 227).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: White linen vestments worn over cassocks.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Large Dublin hotel.[Return to reference 5](#)

The Lost Land

I have two daughters.

They are all I ever wanted from the earth.

Or almost all.

I also wanted one piece of ground:

5 One city trapped by hills. One urban river.
An island in its element.

So I could say *mine. My own.*
And mean it.

Now they are grown up and far away

10 and memory itself
has become an emigrant,
wandering in a place
where love disassembles itself as landscape:

Where the hills
15 are the colours of a child's eyes,
where my children are distances, horizons:

At night,
on the edge of sleep,
I can see the shore of Dublin Bay.
20 Its rocky sweep and its granite pier.

Is this, I say
how they must have seen it,

backing out on the mailboat at twilight,
shadows falling
on everything they had to leave?
25 And would love forever?
And then
I imagine myself
at the landward rail of that boat
30 searching for the last sight of a hand.
I see myself
on the underworld side of that water,
the darkness coming in fast, saying
all the names I know for a lost land:
35 *Ireland. Absence. Daughter.*

1998

SALMAN RUSHDIE

b. 1947

The most influential novelist to have come from South Asia in the last seventy years is Ahmed Salman Rushdie, whose dynamic narratives—stories of magic, suffering, and the vitality of human beings in the grip of history—helped generate a literary renaissance in India. “I come from Bombay,” Rushdie has said, “and from a Muslim family, too. ‘My’ India has always been based on ideas of multiplicity, pluralism, hybridity: ideas to which the ideologies of the communalists are diametrically opposed. To my mind, the defining image of India is the crowd, and a crowd is by its very nature superabundant, heterogeneous, many things at once.” Rushdie was educated at Cathedral School, Bombay (now Mumbai), and from the age of thirteen, at Rugby School, Warwickshire, and King’s College, Cambridge. After living briefly in Pakistan, where his prosperous family had moved, Rushdie settled in England, working as an actor and as a freelance advertising copywriter (1970–80).

His first novel, *Grimus* (1979), passed unnoticed, but his second, *Midnight’s Children* (1981), announced the arrival of a major writer. Taking its title from those who were born—two months later than its author—around midnight on August 15, 1947, when the independent state of India was born, *Midnight’s Children* is a work of prodigious prodigality, a cornucopia as richly fertile in character, incident, and language as the subcontinent that is its setting. The book’s triumphant progress across the world culminated in its being judged

“the Booker of Bookers,” the best novel to have won Britain’s premier fiction prize in its first twenty-five years. Rushdie has said that “we’re all radio-active with history,” and the books that have followed *Midnight’s Children* have again shown a form of “magical realism”—learned from Latin American writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez—deployed in the service of a powerful political-historical imagination. Rushdie’s most notable novels of the 1990s and 2000s return to themes of historical violence, pluralism, and transnational violence, such as in *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), while making use of the forms of fable, fantasy, and metafictional narration, such as in *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), *Quichotte* (2019), and *Victory City* (2023).

In 1988 Rushdie found himself at the perilous center of a real, rather than a magical-realist, political-historical storm. His novel *The Satanic Verses* provoked riots in India, Pakistan, and South Africa, and was judged by senior religious figures in Iran to have blasphemed the Prophet Muhammad (called by the offensive name “Mahound” in the novel), founder of the Muslim faith. A fatwa, or legal decree, calling for his death was pronounced. He was obliged to go into hiding, and for almost a decade lived under round-the-clock protection from British Secret Service agents, while governments argued for and against the lifting of the fatwa, and the author himself became symbolic of the vulnerability of the intellectual in the face of fundamentalism. The lifting of the fatwa in 1998 allowed Rushdie to reappear in public, but it is seen as irrevocable by some religious groups, and so his life has remained under constant threat. On August 12, 2022, just as he was about to give a lecture at the Chatauqua Institution in New York State, Rushdie was attacked by a man and stabbed multiple times, afterward spending six weeks in the hospital and losing vision in one eye.

Rushdie has defended *The Satanic Verses* in the essay “In Good Faith” (1990), while defining the irreverently pluralistic vision behind his “mongrel” aesthetic—a vision that has repeatedly resulted in the

burning or banning of his books by political nationalists and religious purists in South Asia and other parts of the world:

If *The Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity.

Standing at the centre of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background, struggling with just the sort of great problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new. Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.

An earlier story, published the same year as his groundbreaking *Midnight's Children*, had invoked the Prophet uncontroversially. Like *Midnight's Children*, the story "The Prophet's Hair" buoyantly fuses Standard English with an exuberantly Indianized English, peppered with words of Hindi, Persian, Sanskrit, and Arabic origin—among the many languages that have been used in the extraordinarily polyglot Indian subcontinent. Like *The Satanic Verses*, "The Prophet's Hair" risks playfulness, satire, caricature, and whimsy in its treatment of the religion of his youth (though Rushdie has indicated he was brought up not as a believer but within a relaxed Muslim climate, almost secularized by the variety of other religions surrounding it).

The story is at once a moral fable in the tradition of *The Thousand and One Nights* and a magical-realist extravaganza, packed with incident, poetic detail ("water to which the cold of the night had given the cloudy consistency of wild honey"), and humor, all brilliantly interwoven at breakneck speed.

The Prophet's¹ Hair

Early in the year 19—, when Srinagar² was under the spell of a winter so fierce it could crack men's bones as if they were glass, a young man upon whose cold-pinked skin there lay, like a frost, the unmistakable sheen of wealth was to be seen entering the most wretched and disreputable part of the city, where the houses of wood and corrugated iron seemed perpetually on the verge of losing their balance, and asking in low, grave tones where he might go to engage the services of a dependably professional burglar. The young man's name was Atta, and the rogues in that part of town directed him gleefully into ever darker and less public alleys, until in a yard wet with the blood of a slaughtered chicken he was set upon by two men whose faces he never saw, robbed of the substantial bank-roll which he had insanely brought on his solitary excursion, and beaten within an inch of his life.

Night fell. His body was carried by anonymous hands to the edge of the lake, whence it was transported by shikara³ across the water and deposited, torn and bleeding, on the deserted embankment of the canal which led to the gardens of Shalimar. At dawn the next morning a flower-vendor was rowing his boat through water to which the cold of the night had given the cloudy consistency of wild honey when he saw the prone form of young Atta, who was just beginning to stir and moan, and on whose now deathly pale skin the sheen of wealth could still be made out dimly beneath an actual layer of frost.

The flower-vendor moored his craft and by stooping over the mouth of the injured man was able to learn the poor fellow's address, which was mumbled through lips that could scarcely move; whereupon, hoping for a large tip, the hawker rowed Atta home to a large house on the shores of the lake, where a beautiful but inexplicably bruised

young woman and her distraught, but equally handsome mother, neither of whom, it was clear from their eyes, had slept a wink from worrying, screamed at the sight of their Atta—who was the elder brother of the beautiful young woman—lying motionless amidst the funereally stunted winter blooms of the hopeful florist.

The flower-vendor was indeed paid off handsomely, not least to ensure his silence, and plays no further part in our story. Atta himself, suffering terribly from exposure as well as a broken skull, entered a coma which caused the city's finest doctors to shrug helplessly. It was therefore all the more remarkable that on the very next evening the most wretched and disreputable part of the city received a second unexpected visitor. This was Huma, the sister of the unfortunate young man, and her question was the same as her brother's, and asked in the same low, grave tones:

'Where may I hire a thief?'

The story of the rich idiot who had come looking for a burglar was already common knowledge in those insalubrious⁴ gullies, but this time the young woman added: 'I should say that I am carrying no money, nor am I wearing any jewellery items. My father has disowned me and will pay no ransom if I am kidnapped; and a letter has been lodged with the Deputy Commissioner of Police, my uncle, to be opened in the event of my not being safe at home by morning. In that letter he will find full details of my journey here, and he will move Heaven and Earth to punish my assailants.'

Her exceptional beauty, which was visible even through the enormous welts and bruises disfiguring her arms and forehead, coupled with the oddity of her inquiries, had attracted a sizable group of curious onlookers, and because her little speech seemed to them to cover just about everything, no one attempted to injure her in any way, although there were some raucous comments to the effect that it was pretty peculiar for someone who was trying to hire a crook to invoke the protection of a high-up policeman uncle.

She was directed into ever darker and less public alleys until finally in a gully as dark as ink an old woman with eyes which stared so piercingly that Huma instantly understood she was blind motioned her through a doorway from which darkness seemed to be pouring like smoke. Clenching her fists, angrily ordering her heart to behave normally, Huma followed the old woman into the gloom-wrapped house.

The faintest conceivable rivulet of candlelight trickled through the darkness; following this unreliable yellow thread (because she could no longer see the old lady), Huma received a sudden sharp blow to the shins and cried out involuntarily, after which she at once bit her lip, angry at having revealed her mounting terror to whoever or whatever waited before her, shrouded in blackness.

She had, in fact, collided with a low table on which a single candle burned and beyond which a mountainous figure could be made out, sitting cross-legged on the floor. 'Sit, sit,' said a man's calm, deep voice, and her legs, needing no more flowery invitation, buckled beneath her at the terse command. Clutching her left hand in her right, she forced her voice to respond evenly:

'And you, sir, will be the thief I have been requesting?'

Shifting its weight very slightly, the shadow-mountain informed Huma that all criminal activity originating in this zone was well organised and also centrally controlled, so that all requests for what might be termed freelance work had to be channelled through this room.

He demanded comprehensive details of the crime to be committed, including a precise inventory of items to be acquired, also a clear statement of all financial inducements being offered with no gratuities excluded, plus, for filing purposes only, a summary of the motives for the application.

At this, Huma, as though remembering something, stiffened both in body and resolve and replied loudly that her motives were entirely a matter for herself; that she would discuss details with no one but

the thief himself; but that the rewards she proposed could only be described as 'lavish'.

'All I am willing to disclose to you, sir, since it appears that I am on the premises of some sort of employment agency, is that in return for such lavish rewards I must have the most desperate criminal at your disposal, a man for whom life holds no terrors, not even the fear of God.

'The worst of fellows, I tell you—nothing less will do!'

At this a paraffin storm-lantern was lighted, and Huma saw facing her a grey-haired giant down whose left cheek ran the most sinister of scars, a cicatrice in the shape of the letter *sín* in the Nastaliq⁵ script. She was gripped by the insupportably nostalgic notion that the bogeyman of her childhood nursery had risen up to confront her, because her ayah⁶ had always forestalled any incipient acts of disobedience by threatening Huma and Atta: 'You don't watch out and I'll send that one to steal you away—that Sheikh⁷ *Sín*, the Thief of Thieves!'

Here, grey-haired but unquestionably scarred, was the notorious criminal himself—and was she out of her mind, were her ears playing tricks, or had he truly just announced that, given the stated circumstances, he himself was the only man for the job?

Struggling hard against the newborn goblins of nostalgia, Huma warned the fearsome volunteer that only a matter of extreme urgency and peril would have brought her unescorted into these ferocious streets.

'Because we can afford no last-minute backings-out,' she continued, 'I am determined to tell you everything, keeping back no secrets whatsoever. If, after hearing me out, you are still prepared to proceed, then we shall do everything in our power to assist you, and to make you rich.'

The old thief shrugged, nodded, spat. Huma began her story.

Six days ago, everything in the household of her father, the wealthy moneylender Hashim, had been as it always was. At breakfast her mother had spooned khichri⁸ lovingly on to the moneylender's plate; the conversation had been filled with those expressions of courtesy and solicitude on which the family prided itself.

Hashim was fond of pointing out that while he was not a godly man he set great store by 'living honourably in the world'. In that spacious lakeside residence, all outsiders were greeted with the same formality and respect, even those unfortunates who came to negotiate for small fragments of Hashim's large fortune, and of whom he naturally asked an interest rate of over 70 per cent, partly, as he told his khichri-spooning wife, 'to teach these people the value of money; let them only learn that, and they will be cured of this fever of borrowing borrowing all the time—so you see that if my plans succeed, I shall put myself out of business!'

In their children, Atta and Huma, the moneylender and his wife had successfully sought to inculcate the virtues of thrift, plain dealing and a healthy independence of spirit. On this, too, Hashim was fond of congratulating himself.

Breakfast ended; the family members wished one another a fulfilling day. Within a few hours, however, the glassy contentment of that household, of that life of porcelain delicacy and alabaster sensibilities, was to be shattered beyond all hope of repair.

The moneylender summoned his personal shikara and was on the point of stepping into it when, attracted, by a glint of silver, he noticed a small vial floating between the boat and his private quay. On an impulse, he scooped it out of the glutinous water.

It was a cylinder of tinted glass cased in exquisitely wrought silver, and Hashim saw within its walls a silver pendant bearing a single strand of human hair.

Closing his fist around this unique discovery, he muttered to the boatman that he'd changed his plans, and hurried to his sanctum,⁹

where, behind closed doors, he feasted his eyes on his find.

There can be no doubt that Hashim the moneylender knew from the first that he was in possession of the famous relic of the Prophet Muhammad, that revered hair whose theft from its shrine at Hazratbal mosque the previous morning had created an unprecedented hue and cry in the valley.

The thieves—no doubt alarmed by the pandemonium, by the procession through the streets of endless ululating¹ crocodiles of lamentation, by the riots, the political ramifications and by the massive police search which was commanded and carried out by men whose entire careers now hung upon the finding of this lost hair—had evidently panicked and hurled the vial into the gelatine bosom of the lake.

Having found it by a stroke of great good fortune, Hashim's duty as a citizen was clear: the hair must be restored to its shrine, and the state to equanimity and peace.

But the moneylender had a different notion.

All around him in his study was the evidence of his collector's mania. There were enormous glass cases full of impaled butterflies from Gulmarg, three dozen scale models in various metals of the legendary cannon Zamzama, innumerable swords, a Naga spear, ninety-four terracotta camels of the sort sold on railway station platforms, many samovars,² and a whole zoology of tiny sandalwood animals, which had originally been carved to serve as children's bathtime toys.

'And after all,' Hashim told himself, 'the Prophet would have disapproved mightily of this relic-worship. He abhorred the idea of being deified! So, by keeping this hair from its distracted devotees, I perform—do I not?—a finer service than I would by returning it! Naturally, I don't want it for its religious value . . . I'm a man of the world, of this world. I see it purely as a secular object of great rarity and blinding beauty. In short, it's the silver vial I desire, more than the hair.

'They say there are American millionaires who purchase stolen art masterpieces and hide them away—they would know how I feel. I must, must have it!'

Every collector must share his treasures with one other human being, and Hashim summoned—and told—his only son Atta, who was deeply perturbed but, having been sworn to secrecy, only spilled the beans when the troubles became too terrible to bear.

The youth excused himself and left his father alone in the crowded solitude of his collections. Hashim was sitting erect in a hard, straight-backed chair, gazing intently at the beautiful vial.

It was well known that the moneylender never ate lunch, so it was not until evening that a servant entered the sanctum to summon his master to the dining-table. He found Hashim as Atta had left him. The same, and not the same—for now the moneylender looked swollen, distended. His eyes bulged even more than they always had, they were red-rimmed, and his knuckles were white.

He seemed to be on the point of bursting! As though, under the influence of the misappropriated relic, he had filled up with some spectral fluid which might at any moment ooze uncontrollably from his every bodily opening.

He had to be helped to the table, and then the explosion did indeed take place.

Seemingly careless of the effect of his words on the carefully constructed and fragile constitution of the family's life, Hashim began to gush, to spume long streams of awful truths. In horrified silence, his children heard their father turn upon his wife, and reveal to her that for many years their marriage had been the worst of his afflictions. 'An end to politeness!' he thundered. 'An end to hypocrisy!'

Next, and in the same spirit, he revealed to his family the existence of a mistress; he informed them also of his regular visits to paid women. He told his wife that, far from being the principal beneficiary of his will, she would receive no more than the eighth

portion which was her due under Islamic law. Then he turned upon his children, screaming at Atta for his lack of academic ability—'A dope! I have been cursed with a dope!'—and accusing his daughter of lasciviousness, because she went around the city barefaced, which was unseemly for any good Muslim girl to do. She should, he commanded, enter purdah³ forthwith.

Hashim left the table without having eaten and fell into the deep sleep of a man who has got many things off his chest, leaving his children stunned, in tears, and the dinner going cold on the sideboard under the gaze of an anticipatory bearer.⁴

At five o'clock the next morning the moneylender forced his family to rise, wash and say their prayers. From then on, he began to pray five times daily for the first time in his life, and his wife and children were obliged to do likewise.

Before breakfast, Huma saw the servants, under her father's direction, constructing a great heap of books in the garden and setting fire to it. The only volume left untouched was the Qur'an,⁵ which Hashim wrapped in a silken cloth and placed on a table in the hall. He ordered each member of his family to read passages from this book for at least two hours per day. Visits to the cinema were forbidden. And if Atta invited male friends to the house, Huma was to retire to her room.

By now, the family had entered a state of shock and dismay; but there was worse to come.

That afternoon, a trembling debtor arrived at the house to confess his inability to pay the latest instalment of interest owed, and made the mistake of reminding Hashim, in somewhat blustering fashion, of the Qur'an's strictures against usury. The moneylender flew into a rage and attacked the fellow with one of his large collection of bullwhips.

By mischance, later the same day a second defaulter came to plead for time, and was seen fleeing Hashim's study with a great gash in his arm, because Huma's father had called him a thief of

other men's money and had tried to cut off the wretch's right hand with one of the thirty-eight kukri knives⁶ hanging on the study walls.

These breaches of the family's unwritten laws of decorum alarmed Atta and Huma, and when, that evening, their mother attempted to calm Hashim down, he struck her on the face with an open hand. Atta leapt to his mother's defence and he, too, was sent flying.

'From now on,' Hashim bellowed, 'there's going to be some discipline around here!'

The moneylender's wife began a fit of hysterics which continued throughout that night and the following day, and which so provoked her husband that he threatened her with divorce, at which she fled to her room, locked the door and subsided into a raga⁷ of sniffing. Huma now lost her composure, challenged her father openly, and announced (with that same independence of spirit which he had encouraged in her) that she would wear no cloth over her face; apart from anything else, it was bad for the eyes.

On hearing this, her father disowned her on the spot and gave her one week in which to pack her bags and go.

By the fourth day, the fear in the air of the house had become so thick that it was difficult to walk around. Atta told his shock-numbered sister: 'We are descending to gutter-level—but I know what must be done.'

That afternoon, Hashim left home accompanied by two hired thugs to extract the unpaid dues from his two insolvent clients. Atta went immediately to his father's study. Being the son and heir, he possessed his own key to the moneylender's safe. This he now used, and removing the little vial from its hiding-place, he slipped it into his trouser pocket and re-locked the safe door.

Now he told Huma the secret of what his father had fished out of Lake Dal, and exclaimed: 'Maybe I'm crazy—maybe the awful things that are happening have made me cracked—but I am convinced there will be no peace in our house until this hair is out of it.'

His sister at once agreed that the hair must be returned, and Atta set off in a hired shikara to Hazratbal mosque. Only when the boat had delivered him into the throng of the distraught faithful which was swirling around the desecrated shrine did Atta discover that the relic was no longer in his pocket. There was only a hole, which his mother, usually so attentive to household matters, must have overlooked under the stress of recent events.

Atta's initial surge of chagrin was quickly replaced by a feeling of profound relief.

'Suppose', he imagined, 'that I had already announced to the mullahs⁸ that the hair was on my person! They would never have believed me now—and this mob would have lynched me! At any rate, it has gone, and that's a load off my mind.' Feeling more contented than he had for days, the young man returned home.

Here he found his sister bruised and weeping in the hall; upstairs, in her bedroom, his mother wailed like a brand-new widow. He begged Huma to tell him what had happened, and when she replied that their father, returning from his brutal business trip, had once again noticed a glint of silver between boat and quay, had once again scooped up the errant relic, and was consequently in a rage to end all rages, having beaten the truth out of her—then Atta buried his face in his hands and sobbed out his opinion, which was that the hair was persecuting them, and had come back to finish the job.

It was Huma's turn to think of a way out of their troubles.

While her arms turned black and blue and great stains spread across her forehead, she hugged her brother and whispered to him that she was determined to get rid of the hair *at all costs*—she repeated this last phrase several times.

'The hair', she then declared, 'was stolen from the mosque; so it can be stolen from this house. But it must be a genuine robbery, carried out by a bona-fide thief, not by one of us who are under the hair's thrall—by a thief so desperate that he fears neither capture nor curses.'

Unfortunately, she added, the theft would be ten times harder to pull off now that their father, knowing that there had already been one attempt on the relic, was certainly on his guard.

'Can you do it?'

Huma, in a room lit by candle and storm-lantern, ended her account with one further question: 'What assurances can you give that the job holds no terrors for you still?'

The criminal, spitting, stated that he was not in the habit of providing references, as a cook might, or a gardener, but he was not alarmed so easily, certainly not by any children's djinni⁹ of a curse. Huma had to be content with this boast, and proceeded to describe the details of the proposed burglary.

'Since my brother's failure to return the hair to the mosque, my father has taken to sleeping with his precious treasure under his pillow. However, he sleeps alone, and very energetically; only enter his room without waking him, and he will certainly have tossed and turned quite enough to make the theft a simple matter. When you have the vial, come to my room,' and here she handed Sheikh Sín a plan of her home, 'and I will hand over all the jewellery owned by my mother and myself. You will find . . . it is worth . . . that is, you will be able to get a fortune for it . . . '

It was evident that her self-control was weakening and that she was on the point of physical collapse.

'Tonight,' she burst out finally. 'You must come tonight!'

No sooner had she left the room than the old criminal's body was convulsed by a fit of coughing: he spat blood into an old vanaspati¹ can. The great Sheikh, the 'Thief of Thieves', had become a sick man, and every day the time drew nearer when some young pretender to his power would stick a dagger in his stomach. A lifelong addiction to gambling had left him almost as poor as he had been when, decades ago, he had started out in this line of work as a mere pickpocket's apprentice; so in the extraordinary commission he had accepted from the moneylender's daughter he saw his

opportunity of amassing enough wealth at a stroke to leave the valley for ever, and acquire the luxury of a respectable death which would leave his stomach intact.

As for the Prophet's hair, well, neither he nor his blind wife had ever had much to say for prophets—that was one thing they had in common with the moneylender's thunderstruck clan.

It would not do, however, to reveal the nature of this, his last crime, to his four sons. To his consternation, they had all grown up to be hopelessly devout men, who even spoke of making the pilgrimage to Mecca some day. 'Absurd!' their father would laugh at them. 'Just tell me how you will go?' For, with a parent's absolutist love, he had made sure they were all provided with a lifelong source of high income by crippling them at birth, so that, as they dragged themselves around the city, they earned excellent money in the begging business.

The children, then, could look after themselves.

He and his wife would be off soon with the jewel-boxes of the moneylender's women. It was a timely chance indeed that had brought the beautiful bruised girl into his corner of the town.

That night, the large house on the shore of the lake lay blindly waiting, with silence lapping at its walls. A burglar's night: clouds in the sky and mists on the winter water. Hashim the moneylender was asleep, the only member of his family to whom sleep had come that night. In another room, his son Atta lay deep in the coils of his coma with a blood-clot forming on his brain, watched over by a mother who had let down her long greying hair to show her grief, a mother who placed warm compresses on his head with gestures redolent of impotence. In a third bedroom Huma waited, fully dressed, amidst the jewel-heavy caskets of her desperation.

At last a bulbul² sang softly from the garden below her window and, creeping downstairs, she opened a door to the bird, on whose face there was a scar in the shape of the Nastaliq letter *sín*.

Noiselessly, the bird flew up the stairs behind her. At the head of the staircase they parted, moving in opposite directions along the corridor of their conspiracy without a glance at one another.

Entering the moneylender's room with professional ease, the burglar, Sín, discovered that Huma's predictions had been wholly accurate. Hashim lay sprawled diagonally across his bed, the pillow untenanted by his head, the prize easily accessible. Step by padded step, Sín moved towards the goal.

It was at this point that, in the bedroom next door, young Atta sat bolt upright in his bed, giving his mother a great fright, and without any warning—prompted by goodness knows what pressure of the blood-clot upon his brain—began screaming at the top of his voice:

'Thief! Thief! Thief!'

It seems probable that his poor mind had been dwelling, in these last moments, upon his own father; but it is impossible to be certain, because having uttered these three emphatic words the young man fell back upon his pillow and died.

At once his mother set up a screeching and a wailing and a keening and a howling so earsplittingly intense that they completed the work which Atta's cry had begun—that is, her laments penetrated the walls of her husband's bedroom and brought Hashim wide awake.

Sheikh Sín was just deciding whether to dive beneath the bed or brain the moneylender good and proper when Hashim grabbed the tiger-striped swordstick which always stood propped up in a corner beside his bed, and rushed from the room without so much as noticing the burglar who stood on the opposite side of the bed in the darkness. Sín stooped quickly and removed the vial containing the Prophet's hair from its hiding-place.

Meanwhile Hashim had erupted into the corridor, having unsheathed the sword inside his cane. In his right hand he held the weapon and was waving it about dementedly. His left hand was

shaking the stick. A shadow came rushing towards him through the midnight darkness of the passageway and, in his somnolent anger, the moneylender thrust his sword fatally through its heart. Turning up the light, he found that he had murdered his daughter, and under the dire influence of this accident he was so overwhelmed by remorse that he turned the sword upon himself, fell upon it and so extinguished his life. His wife, the sole surviving member of the family, was driven mad by the general carnage and had to be committed to an asylum for the insane by her brother, the city's Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Sheikh Sín had quickly understood that the plan had gone awry.

Abandoning the dream of the jewel-boxes when he was but a few yards from its fulfilment, he climbed out of Hashim's window and made his escape during the appalling events described above. Reaching home before dawn, he woke his wife and confessed his failure. It would be necessary, he whispered, for him to vanish for a while. Her blind eyes never opened until he had gone.

The noise in the Hashim household had roused their servants and even managed to awaken the night-watchman, who had been fast asleep as usual on his charpoy³ by the street-gate. They alerted the police, and the Deputy Commissioner himself was informed. When he heard of Huma's death, the mournful officer opened and read the sealed letter which his niece had given him, and instantly led a large detachment of armed men into the light-repellent gullies of the most wretched and disreputable part of the city.

The tongue of a malicious cat-burglar named Huma's fellow-conspirator; the finger of an ambitious bank-robber pointed at the house in which he lay concealed; and although Sín managed to crawl through a hatch in the attic and attempt a roof-top escape, a bullet from the Deputy Commissioner's own rifle penetrated his stomach and brought him crashing messily to the ground at the feet of Huma's enraged uncle.

From the dead thief's pocket rolled a vial of tinted glass, cased in filigree silver.

The recovery of the Prophet's hair was announced at once on All-India Radio. One month later, the valley's holiest men assembled at the Hazratbal mosque and formally authenticated the relic. It sits to this day in a closely guarded vault by the shores of the loveliest of lakes in the heart of the valley which was once closer than any other place on earth to Paradise.

But before our story can properly be concluded, it is necessary to record that when the four sons of the dead Sheikh awoke on the morning of his death, having unwittingly spent a few minutes under the same roof as the famous hair, they found that a miracle had occurred, that they were all sound of limb and strong of wind, as whole as they might have been if their father had not thought to smash their legs in the first hours of their lives. They were, all four of them, very properly furious, because the miracle had reduced their earning powers by 75 per cent, at the most conservative estimate; so they were ruined men.

Only the Sheikh's widow had some reason for feeling grateful, because although her husband was dead she had regained her sight, so that it was possible for her to spend her last days gazing once more upon the beauties of the valley of Kashmir.

1981

Endnotes

- Note 1: The Prophet Muhammad, founder of the Muslim religion, was born in Mecca in about 570 and died in 632. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Capital of the state of Kashmir. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Long, swift Kashmiri boat. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Unhealthy. [Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A Persian cursive script, characterized by rounded forms and elongated horizontal strokes. "Cicatrice": scar of a healed

wound.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Child's nurse (Anglo-Indian, from Portuguese).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Chief (Arabic).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Rice and lentils cooked together (Hindi).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Private room.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Howling.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Apparatuses for making tea (Russian for "self-boilers").[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Area of certain traditional Indian houses in which Hindu or Muslim women live secluded from the sight of men outside their family circle.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Servant.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Or Koran, Muslims' sacred book: a collection of the Prophet Muhammad's oral revelations.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Curved knives broadening toward the point (Hindi).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Musical improvisation (Sanskrit).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Muslims learned in Islamic theology and sacred law.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In Muslim demonology, a spirit (genie) with supernatural powers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Vegetable fat used as butter in India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Asian song thrush.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Light Indian bedstead.[Return to reference 3](#)

ANNE CARSON

b. 1950

Anne Carson was born in Toronto, Canada, and grew up in Ontario; she received both her B.A. and her Ph.D. in classics from the University of Toronto. The recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, she has taught classics at the universities of Calgary, Princeton, Emory, McGill, and Michigan. Along with poetry, she has published books of criticism on classical literature, translations and adaptations from Greek, novels-in-verse, *Autobiography of Red* (1998) and *Red Doc* (2013), and the play *Norma Jeane Baker of Troy* (2019).

In her poetry, Carson braids together the ruminative texture of the essay, the narrative propulsion of the novel, the self-analysis of autobiography, and the lapidary compression of lyric. In “The Glass Essay,” a long poem that reflects on the dislocations of identity through time, love, and madness, she vividly narrates the end of a love affair, a visit with a difficult mother, and the degeneration of a father with Alzheimer’s in a nursing home. Into this semiautobiographical tale she weaves commentary on the writings of the Brontë sisters, whose works function—like the classical texts she often incorporates into her poetry—as oblique and remote points of comparison for the poet’s experience. Both personal and impersonal, Carson’s poetry bridges the gap between private narrative and philosophical speculation, between self-excavation and literary-critical analysis. Tightly wound with crisp diction, studded with striking metaphors, etched with epigrams and ironies, her poems are

both lucid in feeling and intense in thought. They are at one and the same time intellectually crystalline and emotionally volcanic.

From The Glass Essay

* * *

160 Well there are many ways of being held prisoner,
I am thinking as I stride over the moor.
As a rule after lunch mother has a nap

and I go out to walk.
The bare blue trees and bleached wooden sky of
April
carve into me with knives of light.

165 Something inside it reminds me of childhood—
it is the light of the stalled time after lunch
when clocks tick

and hearts shut
and fathers leave to go back to work
and mothers stand at the kitchen sink pondering
170 something they never tell.
You remember too much,
my mother said to me recently.

Why hold onto all that? And I said,
Where can I put it down?
175 She shifted to a question about airports.

Crops of ice are changing to mud all around me
as I push on across the moor
warmed by drifts from the pale blue sun.

On the edge of the moor our pines

dip and coast in breezes
from somewhere else.

180

Perhaps the hardest thing about losing a lover is
to watch the year repeat its days.
It is as if I could dip my hand down

185

into time and scoop up
blue and green lozenges^o of April heat
a year ago in another country.

I can feel that other day running underneath this
one
like an old videotape—here we go fast around the
last corner

190

up the hill to his house, shadows
of limes and roses blowing in the car window
and music spraying from the radio and him
singing and touching my left hand to his lips.

Law¹ lived in a high blue room from which he could
see the sea.

195

Time in its transparent loops as it passes beneath
me now
still carries the sound of the telephone in that room
and traffic far off and doves under the window
chuckling coolly and his voice saying,
You beauty. I can feel that beauty's

200

heart beating inside mine as she presses into his
arms in the high blue room—
No, I say aloud. I force my arms down
through air which is suddenly cold and heavy as
water

and the videotape jerks to a halt
like a glass slide under a drop of blood.
205 I stop and turn and stand into the wind,

which now plunges towards me over the moor.
When Law left I felt so bad I thought I would die.
This is not uncommon.

I took up the practice of meditation.
210 Each morning I sat on the floor in front of my sofa
and chanted bits of old Latin prayers.

*De profundis clamavi ad te Domine.*²
Each morning a vision came to me.
Gradually I understood that these were naked
215 glimpses of my soul.

I called them Nudes.
Nude #1. Woman alone on a hill.
She stands into the wind.

It is a hard wind slanting from the north.
Long flaps and shreds of flesh rip off the woman's
220 body and lift
and blow away on the wind, leaving

an exposed column of nerve and blood and muscle
calling mutely through lipless mouth.
It pains me to record this,

I am not a melodramatic person.
225 But soul is "hewn in a wild workshop"
as Charlotte Brontë says of *Wuthering Heights*.³

Charlotte's preface to *Wuthering Heights* is a
publicist's masterpiece.
Like someone carefully not looking at a scorpion

230 crouched on the arm of the sofa Charlotte
talks firmly and calmly
about the other furniture of Emily's workshop—about
the inexorable spirit ("stronger than a man, simpler
than a child"),
the cruel illness ("pain no words can render"),
235 the autonomous end ("she sank rapidly, she made
haste to leave us")
and about Emily's total subjection
to a creative project she could neither understand
nor control,
and for which she deserves no more praise nor
blame
than if she had opened her mouth
240 "to breathe lightning." The scorpion is inching down
the arm of the sofa while Charlotte
continues to speak helpfully about lightning
and other weather we may expect to experience
when we enter Emily's electrical atmosphere.
It is "a horror of great darkness" that awaits us there
245 but Emily is not responsible. Emily was in the grip.
"Having formed these beings she did not know what
she had done,"
says Charlotte (of Heathcliff and Earnshaw and
Catherine).⁴
Well there are many ways of being held prisoner.
250 The scorpion takes a light spring and lands on our
left knee
as Charlotte concludes, "On herself she had no pity."

Pitiless too are the Heights, which Emily called
Wuthering
because of their “bracing ventilation”
and “a north wind over the edge.”

255 Whaching⁵ a north wind grind the moor
that surrounded her father’s house on every side,
formed of a kind of rock called millstone grit,

taught Emily all she knew about love and its
necessities—
an angry education that shapes the way her
characters
260 use one another. “My love for Heathcliff,” says
Catherine,

“resembles the eternal rocks beneath—
a source of little visible delight, but necessary.”
Necessary? I notice the sun has dimmed

and the afternoon air sharpening.
265 I turn and start to recross the moor towards home.
What are the imperatives

that hold people like Catherine and Heathcliff
together and apart, like pores blown into hot rock
and then stranded out of reach

270 of one another when it hardens? What kind of
necessity is that?
The last time I saw Law was a black night in
September.
Autumn had begun,

my knees were cold inside my clothes.
A chill fragment of moon rose.
He stood in my living room and spoke

275 without looking at me. Not enough spin on it,
he said of our five years of love.
Inside my chest I felt my heart snap into two pieces

which floated apart. By now I was so cold
280 it was like burning. I put out my hand
to touch his. He moved back.

I don't want to be sexual with you, he said.
Everything gets crazy.
But now he was looking at me.
Yes, I said as I began to remove my clothes.

285 Everything gets crazy. When nude
I turned my back because he likes the back.
He moved onto me.

Everything I know about love and its necessities
I learned in that one moment
290 when I found myself

thrusting my little burning red backside like a baboon
at a man who no longer cherished me.
There was no area of my mind

not appalled by this action, no part of my body
295 that could have done otherwise.
But to talk of mind and body begs the question.

Soul is the place,
stretched like a surface of millstone grit between
body and mind,
where such necessity grinds itself out.

300 Soul is what I kept watch on all that night.
Law stayed with me.

We lay on top of the covers as if it weren't really a
night of sleep and time,
caressing and singing to one another in our made-up
language
like the children we used to be.
That was a night that centred Heaven and Hell,
305 as Emily would say. We tried to fuck
but he remained limp, although happy. I came
again and again, each time accumulating lucidity,
until at last I was floating high up near the ceiling
looking down
310 on the two souls clasped there on the bed
with their mortal boundaries
visible around them like lines on a map.
I saw the lines harden.
He left in the morning.
315 It is very cold
walking into the long scraped April wind.
At this time of year there is no sunset
just some movements inside the light and then a
sinking away.

1995

Endnotes

- Note 1: The speaker's lover. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Psalm 130: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord" (Latin). [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Novel by English author Emily Brontë (1818–1848). Her sister Charlotte (1815–1855) wrote an introduction to the 1850 edition, explaining how such a mild and modest woman could

have created a work of such passionate imagination and apparent “coarseness.” The speaker of “The Glass Essay” compares herself to Emily Brontë throughout the poem.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: Three characters from *Wuthering Heights*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Emily Brontë’s idiosyncratic spelling of *watcher*, as the poem explains earlier. This excerpt is from its fourth section, also titled “Whacher.”[Return to reference 5](#)

Notes

- °: *diamond-shaped figures*[Return to reference °](#)

PAUL MULDOON

b. 1951

Paul Muldoon was born in Portadown, County Armagh, Northern Ireland. His mother was a schoolteacher; his father, a farm laborer and mushroom grower. Paul grew up in, as he put it, "a little enclave of Roman Catholics living within the predominantly Protestant parish of Loughgall, the village where the Orange Order was founded in 1795" (a unionist, anti-Catholic fraternal organization). Despite inheriting strong Republican sympathies, he depicts the Catholic Church unsympathetically, even going so far as to state that there is "a very fine line between organized religion and organized crime." His skepticism toward the nationalist extremism of the Irish Republican Army is evident in the wryly psychoanalytic poem "Anseo," which traces an IRA fighter's violent ways back to the violence inflicted on him by a cruel primary school teacher.

Muldoon was educated at the primary school in Collegelands (where his mother taught); St. Patrick's College, Armagh; and Queen's University, Belfast, where he was tutored by Seamus Heaney and came to know other poets of the "Belfast Group," such as Derek Mahon and Michael Longley. He worked as a radio and television producer for the British Broadcasting Corporation in Belfast until, in the mid-1980s, he became a freelance writer and moved to the United States, where he teaches at Princeton University. He was elected the Oxford Professor of Poetry, a post he held from 1999 to 2004, and he was the poetry editor of *The New Yorker* from 2007 to

2017. His collections of poems *Howdie-Skelp*, titled after the slap a midwife gives a newborn, was published in 2021.

Muldoon's first published poems were written in Irish, and although he soon switched to English, Irish words and phrases, such as "Anseo," continued to appear in his work. Like other Irish poets, he has had to contend with the long shadow cast by W. B. Yeats. In "7, Middagh Street," Muldoon quotes Yeats's agonizing worry, in his late poem "Man and the Echo," that his art may have helped inspire the executed leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916: "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?" In Muldoon's poem, the characteristically irreverent answer, spoken by W. H. Auden, is "'Certainly not'. / / If Yeats had saved his pencil-lead / would certain men have stayed in bed?" Muldoon is more circumspect than Yeats about the power of art to alter the course of history. Informed by his postmodern skepticism about language, his approach to the Irish Troubles is also more oblique and ironic than that of his tutor, Seamus Heaney. In "Anseo" and "Turtles," among his many poems that eerily skew the form of the sonnet, he deploys multiple screens of irony to tell sly parables about the relation of language to history, of art to violence, especially of the Irish Troubles.

As with many other Irish poets, the United States soon loomed large in Muldoon's imagination. Excited by American films, he adapted cinematic techniques in long, hectic, hallucinatory poems. Other poems, such as "Meeting the British," parallel the plight of Native Americans with that of Northern Irish Catholics. Still others, such as "The Loaf," vigorously play on refrain, rhyme, and other repetitive formal structures to recall the sad history of Irish laborers in the United States. His earliest literary influence was, he said, Robert Frost's "strong, classic, lyric line. But the most important thing . . . was his mischievous, sly, multi-layered quality under the surface." It would be hard to improve on that last sentence as a description of Muldoon's own style, the expression of an omnivorous imagination that—in "Milkweed and Monarch," for example—mixes sensations at his parents' Collegelands grave with geographically scattered memories into a kaleidoscopic pattern that is at once

moving, musically satisfying, and a brilliant postmodern variation on the poetic form of the villanelle (with the repetition of its first and third lines).

Anseo

When the Master was calling the roll
At the primary school in Collegelands,¹
You were meant to call back *Anseo*
And raise your hand
As your name occurred.
5 *Anseo*, meaning here, here and now,
All present and correct,
Was the first word of Irish I spoke.
The last name on the ledger
10 Belonged to Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward²
And was followed, as often as not,
By silence, knowing looks,
A nod and a wink, the Master's droll
'And where's our little Ward-of-court?'³

15 I remember the first time he came back
The Master had sent him out
Along the hedges
To weigh up for himself and cut
A stick with which he would be beaten.
After a while, nothing was spoken;
20 He would arrive as a matter of course
With an ash-plant, a salley-rod.⁴
Or, finally, the hazel-wand
He had whittled down to a whip-lash,
Its twist of red and yellow lacquers
25 Sanded and polished,
And altogether so delicately wrought
That he had engraved his initials on it.

I last met Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward

30 In a pub just over the Irish border.
He was living in the open,
In a secret camp
On the other side of the mountain.
He was fighting for Ireland,
Making things happen.
35 And he told me, Joe Ward,
Of how he had risen through the ranks
To Quartermaster, Commandant:
How every morning at parade
His volunteers would call back *Anseo*
42 And raise their hands
As their names occurred.

1980

Endnotes

- Note 1: Village in Northern Ireland where Muldoon went to school and his mother taught. [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Named after Joseph Mary Plunkett (1887–1916), one of the rebel leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916, executed for his role in planning the rebellion against British rule. [Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A minor under the care of a court-appointed guardian. [Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Stick made from a willow tree. "Ash-plant": stick or whip made from a sapling of the ash tree. [Return to reference 4](#)

Meeting the British

We met the British in the dead of winter.
The sky was lavender

and the snow lavender-blue.
I could hear, far below,

5 the sound of two streams coming together
(both were frozen over)

and, no less strange,
myself calling out in French

10 across that forest-
clearing. Neither General Jeffery Amherst¹

nor Colonel Henry Bouquet
could stomach our willow-tobacco.

15 As for the unusual
scent when the Colonel shook out his hand-
kerchief: *C'est la lavande,*
*une fleur mauve comme le ciel.*²

They gave us six fishhooks
and two blankets embroidered with smallpox.

1987

Endnotes

- Note 1:

Jeffery Amherst, commander-in-chief of British forces in the French and Indian War (1754–63), fought against France and its Native American allies. During Pontiac's Rebellion (1763–64), led by Ottawa chief Pontiac in the Great Lakes region, Amherst wrote to the British officer Colonel Bouquet, "Could it not be contrived to Send the *Small Pox* among those Disaffected Tribes of Indians?" Bouquet replied, "I will try to inoculate [that is, infect] the Indians by means of Blankets that may fall in their hands, taking care however not to get the disease myself," to which Amherst responded, "You will Do well to try to Inoculate the Indians by means of Blanketts, as well as to try Every other method that can serve to Extirpate this Execreble Race." Apparently as a result of this and similar plans of other British officers, many Native Americans in the area, never having been exposed to smallpox, were killed by the disease in 1763–64. Pontiac concluded a peace treaty with the British in July 1766.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: It is lavender, a flower purple as the sky (French).[Return to reference 2](#)

From 7, Middagh Street

From *Wystan*¹

* * *

65 And were Yeats living at this hour
it should be in some ruined tower

not malachited Ballylee²
where he paid out to those below

one gilt-edged scroll from his pencil
as though he were part-Rapunzel

70 and partly Delphic oracle.³
As for his crass, rhetorical

posturing, 'Did that play of mine
send out certain men (*certain* men?)

the English shot . . . ?⁴
75 the answer is 'Certainly not'.

If Yeats had saved his pencil-lead
would certain men have stayed in bed?

For history's a twisted root
with art its small, translucent fruit

80 and never the other way round.
The roots by which we were once bound

are severed here, in any case,
and we are all now dispossessed;

prince, poet, construction worker,
85 salesman, soda fountain jerker—

all equally isolated.
Each loads flour, sugar and salted

beef into a covered wagon
and strikes out for his Oregon,

90 each straining for the ghostly axe
of a huge, blond-haired lumberjack.

* * *

1987

Endnotes

- Note 1: This long poem is spoken in various voices, including this selection from "Wystan," first name of the Anglo-American poet W. H. Auden (1907–1973), whose periodic Brooklyn Heights address is the title of the poem.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The ancient Norman tower that the Irish poet W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) purchased and lived in. "Malachited": of a deep green color.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In ancient Greece, a cave and shrine where a priestess supposedly under a god's influence gave riddling answers to questions brought by worshipers. "Rapunzel": fairy-tale character imprisoned in a tower who let down her long hair for her rescuer to climb.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: From Yeats's poem "Man and the Echo" (see p. 244), in which he worries that his nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*

(1902) helped inspire the violent Easter 1916 uprising against British rule. [Return to reference 4](#)

Milkweed and Monarch

As he knelt by the grave of his mother and father
the taste of dill, or tarragon—
he could barely tell one from the other—

filled his mouth. It seemed as if he might smother.
Why should he be stricken
5 with grief, not for his mother and father,

but a woman slinking from the fur of a sea-otter
in Portland, Maine, or, yes, Portland, Oregon—
he could barely tell one from the other—

and why should he now savour
10 the tang of her, her little pickled gherkin,
as he knelt by the grave of his mother and father?

•

He looked about. He remembered her palaver^o
on how both earth and sky would darken—
15 “You could barely tell one from the other”—

while the Monarch butterflies passed over
in their milkweed-hunger:¹ “A wing-beat, some
reckon,
may trigger off the mother and father

of all storms, striking your Irish Cliffs of Moher
with the force of a hurricane.”
20 Then: “Milkweed and Monarch ‘invented’ each other.”

•

He looked about. Cow's-parsley in a samovar.²
He'd mistaken his mother's name, "Regan", for
"Anger":
as he knelt by the grave of his mother and father
he could barely tell one from the other.

25

1994

Endnotes

- Note 1: The monarch butterfly's larvae appear to eat only milkweed.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Russian tea urn.[Return to reference 2](#)

Notes

- °: *beguiling talk*[Return to reference °](#)

The Loaf

When I put my finger to the hole they've cut for a
dimmer switch
in a wall of plaster stiffened with horsehair
it seems I've scratched a two-hundred-year-old itch
with a pink and a pink and a pinkie-pick.

5 When I put my ear to the hole I'm suddenly aware
of spades and shovels turning up the gain^o
all the way from Raritan to the Delaware¹
with a clink and a clink and a clinky-click.

When I put my nose to the hole I smell the
floodplain
10 of the canal after a hurricane
and the spots of green grass where thousands of
Irish have lain
with a stink and a stink and a stinky-stick.

When I put my eye to the hole I see one holding
horse dung to the rain
in the hope, indeed, indeed,
15 of washing out a few whole ears of grain
with a wink and a wink and a winkie-wick.

And when I do at last succeed
in putting my mouth to the horsehair-fringed niche
I can taste the small loaf of bread he baked from
that whole seed

with a link and a link and a linky-lick.

20

2002

Endnotes

- Note 1: The Delaware and Raritan Canal was hand-built by Irish immigrants between 1830 and 1834, providing a route from Philadelphia to New York City. During its construction, many Irish laborers died of Asiatic cholera. Muldoon's house in New Jersey was built around 1750.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *volume*[Return to reference °](#)

Turtles

A cubit-wide turtle acting the bin¹ lid
by the side of the canal
conjures those Belfast² nights I lay awake, putting in
a bid
for the police channel
as lid bangers gave the whereabouts
5 of armored cars and petrol^o bombers lit one flare
after another. So many of those former sentries and
scouts
have now taken up the lyre³
I can't be sure of what is and what is not.
The water, for example, has the look of tin.
10 Nor am I certain, given their ability to smell the rot
once the rot sets in,
that turtles have not been enlisted by some police
forces
to help them recover corpses.

2006

Endnotes

- Note 1: Garbage can. "Cubit": ancient measure of length approximately equal to the forearm, or between 18 and 22 inches.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Capital of Northern Ireland and a site, from the 1970s, of violent sectarian conflict (known as "the Troubles") between Protestants and Catholics.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Stringed instrument similar to a harp; a symbol of lyric poetry.[Return to reference 3](#)

Notes

- °: *gasoline* [Return to reference °](#)

HILARY MANTEL

1952–2022

Hilary Mantel was born and grew up in villages in Derbyshire and Cheshire, in the north of England, near greater Manchester. Her parents were struggling Irish Catholic immigrants, a textile worker and a clerk. She was a deeply religious student at convent schools, though by the age of twelve, she had lost her faith. After she studied law at the London School of Economics and the University of Sheffield, she was first employed as a social work assistant at a geriatric hospital and, after a year, as a sales assistant selling dresses in a department store where she began to write. With her husband, a geologist, she lived in Botswana for five years (1977–82) and Saudi Arabia for four (1983–86). Her ongoing and severe endometriosis was first misdiagnosed as psychosomatic. She described her struggle with the painful disease in a memoir, *Giving up the Ghost* (2003), and illness and alienation from the body were frequent concerns in her fiction.

Mantel was the first English novelist and the first woman to become a two-time winner of Britain's most prestigious award for fiction, the Man Booker Prize. The awards were for her historical novels written from the perspective of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's key counselor: *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), the first two books of the trilogy, which ended with *The Mirror and the Light* (2020). By the time she received these prizes and the National Book Critics Circle Award, she had already

published novels in various genres in a wide range of settings and time periods, from revolutionary France and eighteenth-century England to contemporary southern Africa and Saudi Arabia. Despite their variety, all these novels draw, perhaps not surprisingly, on facets of Mantel's life. Written in Saudi Arabia, her first two published novels, *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (1985) and *Vacant Possession* (1986), are black comedies that made use of her experience in social work. In the thriller *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988), cross-cultural tensions erupt after an Englishwoman moves to Saudi Arabia. The theological mystery *Fludd* (1989) casts a critical eye on Roman Catholicism in 1950s England. Although it wasn't published until 1992, *A Place of Greater Safety* was the first novel Mantel wrote—a historical novel centered on three figures in the French Revolution who, she suggested, reflected her youthful idealism. *A Change of Climate* (1994) tells the tragic story of an English missionary couple in southern Africa. *An Experiment in Love* (1995) concerns strained friendships among classmates who end up together at the University of London. *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998) describes an unusually large Irishman (and endometriosis had greatly enlarged Mantel's body) who only briefly fascinates eighteenth-century England. *Beyond Black* (2005) concerns a medium with a powerful memory and perhaps novelistic imagination who travels with her manager through the English suburbs.

Despite the autobiographical traces in her work, Mantel was uncannily able to inhabit minds and social worlds vastly distant from her own, perhaps nowhere more so than in her Thomas Cromwell novels. As a result, she could bring to life a sixteenth-century counselor as a multidimensional character, though Cromwell had been represented by other writers as a cardboard villain. Even with his execution of Henry VIII's perceived enemies, including Thomas More and Anne Boleyn, the shrewd and wily strategist becomes sympathetic in Mantel's retelling. Having grown up in poverty with an abusive father, he makes himself—by virtue of cunning, intelligence, and exacting observation—one of the most powerful and consequential figures of the English Renaissance. The

complexity of Mantel's characters, her brilliant use of dialogue, her deft construction of dramatic scenes, and her fascination with historical detail suggest the abiding impression that Shakespeare made on her in childhood. She said that, having only been exposed to snippets of his work, "I almost exploded with joy when I found there was a whole fat book of plays."

The immense historical and cultural differences between the Tudor court in Mantel's historical novels and the world of her semiautobiographical short story "Sorry to Disturb"—Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, as experienced by a budding English novelist in the 1980s—is a measure of Mantel's range. Yet from Mantel's perspective, these worlds were not entirely unlike. She compared the limits on free expression and the consequent reliance on rumor in both Tudor England and 1980s Saudi Arabia, and in Mantel's telling, women in both worlds find themselves confined and trapped, even under conditions of relative affluence. "Sorry to Disturb" revolves around the misunderstandings between an English narrator and a South Asian businessman who regularly visits her coffinlike apartment. At first it seems as if he might provide a welcome diversion, but their encounters become increasingly vexed as he projects on her certain ideas about the British and other Westerners. She finds herself wanting, as she puts it, to "bear out the national character he had given me," yet also to deflect his gender assumptions. The layering of English with Saudi and South Asian cultural worlds, of fictional narration with dialogue and diary entries, of realist social observation with surreal hints and evocative figurative language (insecticide falling "like bright mists, veils"), all contribute to the making of a rich story. Mantel's tale demonstrates her lifelong ability to write her way into the vulnerability of the outsider, to illuminate the constraints endured by women in various centuries and cultures, and to vivify the lived experience of religious and cultural friction, whether in sixteenth-century England or in the contemporary Persian Gulf.

Sorry to Disturb

In those days, the doorbell didn't ring often, and if it did I would draw back into the body of the house. Only at a persistent ring would I creep over the carpets, and make my way to the front door with its spy hole. We were big on bolts and shutters, deadlocks and mortises, safety chains and windows that were high and barred. Through the spy hole I saw a distraught man in a crumpled, silver-gray suit: thirties, Asian. He had dropped back from the door, and was looking about him, at the closed and locked door opposite, and up the dusty marble stairs. He patted his pockets, took out a balled-up handkerchief, and rubbed it across his face. He looked so fraught that his sweat could have been tears. I opened the door.

At once he raised his hands as if to show he was unarmed, his handkerchief dropping like a white flag. "Madam!" Ghastly pale I must have looked, under the light that dappled the tiled walls with swinging shadows. But then he took a breath, tugged at his creased jacket, ran a hand through his hair and conjured up his business card. "Muhammad Ijaz. Import-Export. I am so sorry to disturb your afternoon. I am totally lost. Would you permit use of your telephone?"

I stood aside to let him in. No doubt I smiled. Given what would ensue, I must suppose I did. "Of course. If it's working today."

I walked ahead and he followed, talking; an important deal, he had almost closed it, visit to client in person necessary, time—he worked up his sleeve and consulted a fake Rolex—time running out; he had the address—again he patted his pockets—but the office is not where it should be. He spoke into the telephone in rapid Arabic, fluent, aggressive, his eyebrows shooting up, finally shaking his head; he put down the receiver, looked at it in regret; then up at me, with a sour smile. Weak mouth, I thought. Almost a handsome man, but not: slim, sallow, easily thrown. "I am in your debt, madam," he said. "Now I must dash."

I wanted to offer him a what—bathroom break? Comfort stop? I had no idea how to phrase it. The absurd phrase *wash and brushup* came into my mind. But he was already heading for the door—though from the way the call had concluded I thought they might not be so keen to see him, at his destination, as he was to see them. “This crazy city,” he said. “They are always digging up the streets and moving them. I am so sorry to break in on your privacy.” In the hall, he darted another glance around and up the stairs. “Only the British will ever help you.” He skidded across the hall and prized open the outer door with its heavy ironwork screen; admitting, for a moment, the dull roar of traffic from Medina Road. The door swung back, he was gone. I closed the hall door discreetly, and melted into the oppressive hush. The air conditioner rattled away, like an old relative with a loose cough. The air was heavy with insecticide; sometimes I sprayed it as I walked, and it fell about me like bright mists, veils. I resumed my phrasebook and tape, Fifth Lesson: *I’m living in Jeddah.*¹ *I’m busy today. God give you strength!*

When my husband came home in the afternoon I told him: “A lost man was here. Pakistani. Businessman. I let him in to phone.”

My husband was silent. The air conditioner hacked away. He walked into the shower, having evicted the cockroaches. Walked out again, dripping, naked, lay on the bed, stared at the ceiling. Next day I swept the business card into a bin.

In the afternoon the doorbell rang again. Ijaz had come back, to apologize, to explain, to thank me for rescuing him. I made him some instant coffee and he sat down and told me about himself.

It was then June 1983. I had been in Saudi Arabia for six months. My husband worked for a Toronto-based company of consulting geologists, and had been seconded² by them to the Ministry of Mineral Resources. Most of his colleagues were housed in family “compounds” of various sizes, but the single men and a childless couple like ourselves had to take what they could get. This was our second flat. The American bachelor who had occupied it before had been moved out in haste. Upstairs, in this block of four flats, lived a

Saudi civil servant with his wife and baby; the fourth flat was empty; on the ground floor across the hall from us lived a Pakistani accountant who worked for a government minister, handling his personal finances. Meeting the womenfolk in the hall or on the stairs—one blacked-out head to toe, one partly veiled—the bachelor had livened up their lives by calling “Hello!” Or possibly “Hi there!”

There was no suggestion of further impertinence. But a complaint had been made, and he vanished, and we went to live there instead. The flat was small by Saudi standards. It had beige carpet and off-white wallpaper on which there was a faint crinkled pattern, almost indiscernible. The windows were guarded by heavy wooden shutters that you cranked down by turning a handle on the inside. Even with the shutters up it was dim and I needed the strip lights on all day. The rooms were closed off from each other by double doors of dark wood, heavy like coffin lids. It was like living in a funeral home, with samples stacked around you, and insect opportunists frying themselves on the lights.

He was a graduate of a Miami business school, Ijaz said, and his business, his main business just now, was bottled water. Had the deal gone through, yesterday? He was evasive—obviously, there was nothing simple about it. He waved a hand—give it time, give it time.

I had no friends in this city as yet. Social life, such as it was, centered on private houses; there were no cinemas, theaters or lecture halls. There were sports grounds, but women could not attend them. No “mixed gatherings” were allowed. The Saudis did not mix with foreign workers. They looked down on them as necessary evils, though white-skinned, English-speaking expatriates were at the top of the pecking order. Others—Ijaz, for example—were “Third Country Nationals,” a label that exposed them to every kind of truculence, insult and daily complication. Indians and Pakistanis staffed the shops and small businesses. Filipinos worked on building sites. Men from Thailand cleaned the streets. Bearded Yemenis sat on the pavement outside lock-up shops, their skirts rucked up, their hairy legs thrust out, their flip-flops inches from the whizzing cars.

I am married, Ijaz said, and to an American; you must meet her. Maybe, he said, maybe you could do something for her, you know? What I foresaw at best was the usual Jeddah arrangement, of couples shackled together. Women had no motive power in this city; they had no driving licenses, and only the rich had drivers. So couples who wanted to visit must do it together. I didn't think Ijaz and my husband would be friends. Ijaz was too restless and nervy. He laughed at nothing. He was always twitching his collar and twisting his feet in their scuffed Oxfords,³ always tapping the fake Rolex, always apologizing. Our apartment is down by the port, he said, with my sister-in-law and my brother, but he's back in Miami just now, and my mother's here just now for a visit, and my wife from America, and my son and my daughter, aged six, aged eight. He reached for his wallet and showed me a strange-looking, steeple-headed little boy. "Saleem."

When he left, he thanked me again for trusting him to come into my house. Why, he said, he might have been anybody. But it is not the British way to think badly of needy strangers. At the door he shook my hand. That's that, I thought. Part of me thought, it had better be.

For one was always observed: overlooked, without precisely being seen, recognized. My Pakistani neighbor Yasmin, to get between my flat and hers, would fling a scarf over her rippling hair, then peep around the door; with nervous, pecking movements she hopped across the marble, head swiveling from side to side, in case someone should choose that very moment to shoulder through the heavy street door. Sometimes, irritated by the dust that blew under the door and banked up on the marble, I would go out into the hall with a long broom. My male Saudi neighbor would come down from the first floor on his way out to his car and step over my brushstrokes without looking at me, his head averted. He was according me invisibility, as a mark of respect to another man's wife.

I was not sure that Ijaz accorded me this respect. Our situation was anomalous and ripe for misunderstanding: I had an afternoon

caller. He probably thought that only the kind of woman who took a lot of risks with herself would let a stranger into her house. Yet I could not guess what he probably thought. Surely a Miami business school, surely his time in the West, had made my attitude seem more normal than not? His talk was relaxed now he knew me, full of feeble jokes that he laughed at himself; but then there was the jiggling of his foot, the pulling of his collar, the tapping of his fingers. I had noticed, listening to my tape, that his situation was anticipated in the Nineteenth Lesson: *I gave the address to my driver, but when we arrived, there wasn't any house at this address.* I hoped to show by my brisk friendliness what was only the truth, that our situation could be simple, because I felt no attraction to him at all; so little that I felt apologetic about it. That is where it began to go wrong—my feeling that I must bear out the national character he had given me, and that I must not slight him or refuse a friendship, in case he thought it was because he was a Third Country National.

For his second visit, and his third, were an interruption, almost an irritation. Having no choice in that city, I had decided to cherish my isolation, coddle it. I was ill in those days, and subject to a fierce drug regime that gave me blinding headaches, made me slightly deaf and made me, though I was hungry, unable to eat. The drugs were expensive and had to be imported from England; my husband's company brought them in by courier. Word of this leaked out, and the company wives decided I was taking fertility drugs; but I did not know this, and my ignorance made our conversations peculiar and, to me, slightly menacing. Why were they always talking, on the occasions of forced company sociability, about women who'd had miscarriages but now had a bouncing babe in the buggy? An older woman confided that her two were adopted; I looked at them and thought Jesus, where from, the zoo? My Pakistani neighbour also joined in the cooing over the offspring that I would have shortly—she was in on the rumors, but I put her hints down to the fact that she was carrying her first child and wanted company. I saw her most mornings for an interval of coffee and chat, and I would rather steer her to talking about Islam, which was easy enough; she was an

educated woman and keen to instruct. June 6th: "Spent two hours with my neighbor," says my diary, "widening the cultural gap."

Next day, my husband brought home air tickets and my exit visa for our first home leave, which was seven weeks away. Thursday, June 9th: "Found a white hair in my head." At home there was a general election, and we sat up through the night to listen to the results on the BBC World Service. When we turned out the light, the grocer's daughter jiggled through my dreams to the strains of "Lillibulero."⁴ Friday was a holiday, and we slept undisturbed till the noon prayer call. Ramadan⁵ began. Wednesday, June 15th: "Read *The Twyborn Affair*⁶ and vomited sporadically."

On the sixteenth our neighbors across the hall left for pilgrimage, robed in white. They rang our doorbell before they left: "Is there anything we can bring you from Mecca?"⁷ June 19th saw me desperate for change, moving the furniture around the sitting room and recording "not much improvement." I write that I am prey to "unpleasant and intrusive thoughts," but I do not say what they are. I describe myself as "hot, sick and morose." By July 4th I must have been happier, because I listened to the *Eroica*⁸ while doing the ironing. But on the morning of July 10th, I got up first, put the coffee on, and went into the sitting room to find that the furniture had been trying to move itself back. An armchair was leaning to the left, as if executing some tipsy dance; at one side its base rested on the carpet, but the other side was a foot in the air, and balanced finely on the rim of a flimsy wastepaper basket. Open-mouthed, I shot back into the bedroom; it was the Eid holiday,⁹ and my husband was still half awake. I gibbered at him. Silent, he rose, put on his glasses, and followed me. He stood in the doorway of the sitting room. He looked around and told me without hesitation it had nothing to do with him. He walked into the bathroom. I heard him close the door, curse the cockroaches, switch on the shower. I said later, I must be walking in my sleep. Do you think that's it? Do you think I did it? July 12th: "Execution dream again."

The trouble was, Ijaz knew I was at home; how would I be going anywhere? One afternoon I left him standing in the hall, while he

pressed and pressed the doorbell, and next time, when I let him in, he asked me where I had been; when I said, "Ah, sorry, I must have been with my neighbor," I could see he did not believe me, and he looked at me so sorrowfully that my heart went out to him. Jeddah fretted him, it galled him, and he missed, he said, America, he missed his visits to London, he must go soon, take a break; when was our leave, perhaps we might meet up? I explained I did not live in London, which surprised him; he seemed to suspect it was an evasion, like my failure to answer the door. "Because I could get an exit visa," he said again. "Meet up there. Without all this . . ." he gestured at the coffin-lid doors, the heavy, willful furniture.

He made me laugh that day, telling me about his first girlfriend, his American girlfriend whose nickname was Patches. It was easy to picture her, sassy and suntanned, astonishing him one day by pulling off her top, bouncing her bare breasts at him and putting an end to his wan virginity. The fear he felt, the terror of touching her . . . his shameful performance . . . recalling it, he knuckled his forehead. I was charmed, I suppose. How often does a man tell you these things? I told my husband, hoping to make him laugh, but he didn't. Often, to be helpful, I hoovered up the cockroaches before his return from the Ministry. He shed his clothes and headed off. I heard the splash of the shower. Nineteenth Lesson: *Are you married? Yes, my wife is with me, she's standing there in the corner of the room.* I imagined the cockroaches, dark and flailing in the dust bag.

I went back to the dining table, on which I was writing a comic novel. It was a secret activity I never mentioned to the company wives, and barely mentioned to myself. I scribbled under the strip light, until it was time to drive out for food shopping. You had to shop between sunset prayers and night prayers; if you mistimed it, then at the first prayer call the shops slammed down their shutters, trapping you inside, or outside in the wet heat of the car park. The malls were patrolled by volunteers from the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Elimination of Vice.

At the end of July Ijaz brought his family for tea. Mary-Beth was a small woman but seemed swollen beneath the skin; spiritless,

freckled, limp, she was a faded redhead who seemed huddled into herself, unused to conversation. A silent daughter with eyes like dark stars had been trussed up for the visit in a frilly white dress. At six, steeple-headed Saleem had lost his baby fat, and his movements were tentative, as if his limbs were snappable. His eyes were watchful; Mary-Beth hardly met my gaze at all. What had Ijaz told her? That he was taking her to see a woman who was something like he'd like her to be? It was an unhappy afternoon. I can only have got through it because I was buoyed by an uprush of anticipation; my bags were packed for our flight home. A day earlier, when I had gone into the spare room where I kept my clothes, I had met another dismaying sight. The doors of the fitted wardrobe, which were large and solid like the other coffin lids, had been removed from their hinges; they had been replaced, but hung by the lower hinges only, so that their upper halves flapped like the wings of some ramshackle flying machine.

On August 1st we left King Abdulaziz International Airport in an electrical storm, and had a bumpy flight. I was curious about Mary-Beth's situation and hoped to see her again, though another part of me hoped that she and Ijaz would simply vanish.

I didn't return to Jeddah till the very end of November, having left my book with an agent. Just before our leave I had met my Saudi neighbor, a young mother taking a part-time literature course at the women's university. Education for women was regarded as a luxury, an ornament, a way for a husband to boast of his broadmindedness; Munira couldn't even begin to do her assignments, and I took to going up to her flat in the late mornings and doing them for her, while she sat on the floor in her *négligée*, watching Egyptian soaps on TV and eating sunflower seeds. We three women, Yasmin and Munira and I, had become midmorning friends; all the better for them to watch me, I thought, and discuss me when I'm gone. It was easier for Yasmin and me to go upstairs, because to come down Munira had to get kitted out in full veil and abaya;¹ again, that treacherous, hovering moment on the public territory of the

staircase, where a man might burst through from the street and shout "Hi!" Yasmin was a delicate woman, like a princess in a Persian miniature; younger than myself, she was impeccably soignée,² finished with a flawless glaze of good manners and restraint. Munira was nineteen, with coarse, eager good looks, a pale skin, and a mane of hair that crackled with static and seemed to lead a vital, separate life; her laugh was a raucous cackle. She and Yasmin sat on cushions but gave me a chair; they insisted. They served Nescafé in my honor, though I would have preferred a sludgy local brew. I had learned the crude effectiveness of caffeine against migraine; some nights, sleepless, pacing, I careened off the walls, and only the dawn prayer call sent me to bed, still thinking furiously of books I might write.

Ijaz rang the doorbell on December 6th. He was so very pleased to see me after my long leave; beaming, he said, "Now you are more like Patches than ever." I felt a flare of alarm; nothing, nothing had been said about this before. I was slimmer, he said, and looked well—my prescription drugs had been cut down, and I had been exposed to some daylight, I supposed that was what was doing it. But, "No, there is something different about you," he said. One of the company wives had said the same. She thought, no doubt, that I had conceived my baby at last.

I led Ijaz into the sitting room, while he trailed me with compliments, and made the coffee. "Maybe it's my book," I said, sitting down. "You see, I've written a book . . ." My voice tailed off. This was not his world. No one read books in Jeddah. You could buy anything in the shops except alcohol or a bookcase. My neighbor Yasmin, though she was an English graduate, said she had never read a book since her marriage; she was too busy making supper parties every night. I have had a little success, I explained, or I hope for a little success, I have written a novel you see, and an agent has taken it on.

"It is a storybook? For children?"

"For adults."

"You did this during your vacation?"

"No, I was always writing it." I felt deceitful. I was writing it when I didn't answer the doorbell.

"Your husband will pay to have it published for you."

"No, with luck someone will pay me. A publisher. The agent hopes he can sell it."

"This agent, where did you meet him?"

I could hardly say, in the *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*.³ "In London. At his office."

"But you do not live in London," Ijaz said, as if laying down an ace. He was out to find something wrong with my story. "Probably he is no good. He may steal your money."

I saw of course that in his world, the term *agent* would cover some broad, unsavory categories. But what about "Import-Export," as written on his business cards? That didn't sound to me like the essence of probity. I wanted to argue; I was still upset about Patches; without warning, Ijaz seemed to have changed the terms of engagement between us. "I don't think so. I haven't given him money. His firm, it's well known." Their office is where? Ijaz sniffed, and I pressed on, trying to make my case; though why did I think that an office in William IV Street was a guarantee of moral worth? Ijaz knew London well. "Charing Cross tube?" He still looked affronted. "Near Trafalgar Square?"

Ijaz grunted. "You went to this premises alone?"

I couldn't placate him. I gave him a biscuit. I didn't expect him to understand what I was up to, but he seemed aggrieved that another man had entered my life. "How is Mary-Beth?" I asked.

"She has some kidney disease."

I was shocked. "Is it serious?"

He raised his shoulders; not a shrug, more a rotation of the joints, as if easing some old ache. "She must go back to America for treatment. It's okay. I'm getting rid of her anyway."

I looked away. I hadn't imagined this. "I'm sorry you're unhappy."

"You see really I don't know what's the matter with her," he said testily. "She is always miserable and moping."

"You know, this is not the easiest place for a woman to live."

But did he know? Irritated, he said, "She wanted a big car. So I got a big car. What more does she want me to do?"

December 6th: "Ijaz stayed too long," the diary says. Next day he was back. After the way he had spoken of his wife—and the way he had compared me to dear old Patches from his Miami days—I didn't think I should see him again. But he had hatched a scheme and he wasn't going to let it go. I should come to a dinner party with my husband and meet his family and some of his business contacts. He had been talking about this project before my leave and I knew he set great store by it. I wanted, if I could, to do him some good; he would appear to his customers to be more a man of the world if he could arrange an international gathering, if—let's be blunt—he could produce some white friends. Now the time had come. His sister-in-law was already cooking, he said. I wanted to meet her; I admired these diaspora Asians, their polyglot enterprise, the way they withstood rebuffs, and I wanted to see if she was more Western or Eastern or what. "We have to arrange the transportation," Ijaz said. "I shall come Thursday, when your husband is here. Four o'clock. To give him directions." I nodded. No use drawing a map. They might move the streets again.

The meeting of December 8th was not a success. Ijaz was late, but didn't seem to know it. My husband dispensed the briefest host's courtesies, then sat down firmly in his armchair, which was the one that had tried to levitate. He seemed, by his watchful silence, ready to put an end to any nonsense, from furniture or guests or any other quarter. Sitting on the edge of the sofa, Ijaz flaked his baklava over his lap, he juggled with his fork and jiggled his coffee cup. After our dinner party, he said, almost the next day, he was flying to America on business. "I shall route via London. Just for some recreation. Just to relax, three-four days."

My husband must have stirred himself to ask if he had friends there. "Very old friend," Ijaz said, brushing crumbs to the carpet. "Living at Trafalgar Square. A good district. You know it?"

My heart sank; it was a physical feeling, of the months falling away from me, months in which I'd had little natural light. When Ijaz left—and he kept hovering on the threshold, giving further and better street directions—I didn't know what to say, so I went into the bathroom, kicked out the cockroaches and cowered under the stream of tepid water. Wrapped in a towel, I lay on the bed in the dark. I could hear my husband—I hoped it was he, and not the armchair—moving around in the sitting room. Sometimes in those days when I closed my eyes I felt that I was looking back into my own skull. I could see the hemispheres of my brain. They were convoluted and the color of putty.

The family apartment down by the port was filled with cooking smells and crammed with furniture. There were photographs on every surface, carpets laid on carpets. It was a hot night, and the air conditioners labored and hacked, spitting out water, coughing up lungfuls of mold spores, blights. The table linen was limp and heavily fringed, and I kept fingering these fringes, which felt like nylon fur, like the ears of a teddy bear; they comforted me, though I felt electric with tension. At the table a vast lumpen elder presided, a woman with a long chomping jaw; she was like Quentin Matsys's Ugly Duchess,⁴ except in a spangled sari. The sister-in-law was a bright, brittle woman, who gave a sarcastic lilt to all her phrases. I could see why; it was evident, from her knowing looks, that Ijaz had talked about me, and set me up in some way; if he was proposing me as his next wife, I offered little improvement on the original. Her scorn became complete when she saw I barely touched the food at my elbow; I kept smiling and nodding, demurring and deferring, nibbling a parsley leaf and sipping my Fanta. I wanted to eat, but she might as well have offered me stones on a doily. Did Ijaz think, as the Saudis did, that Western marriages meant nothing? That they were entered impulsively and on impulse broken? Did he assume my husband was as keen to offload me as he was to lose Mary-Beth? From his point of view the evening was not going well. He had expected two supermarket managers, he told us, important men with spending power; now night prayers were over, the traffic was

on the move again, all down Palestine Road and along the Corniche⁵ the traffic lights were turning green, from Thumb Street to the Pepsi flyover⁶ the city was humming, but where were they? Sweat dripped from his face. Fingers jabbed the buttons of the telephone. "Okay, he is delayed? He has left? He is coming now?" He rapped down the receiver, then gazed at the phone as if willing it to chirp back at him, like some pet fowl. "Time means nothing here," he joked, pulling at his collar. The sister-in-law shrugged and turned down her mouth. She never rested, but passed airily through the room in peach chiffon, each time returning from the kitchen with another laden tray; out of sight, presumably, some oily skivvy⁷ was weeping into the dishes. The silent elder put away a large part of the food, pulling the plates toward her and working through them systematically till the pattern showed beneath her questing fingers; you looked away, and when you looked back the plate was clean. Sometimes, the phone rang: "Okay, they're nearly here," Ijaz called. Ten minutes, and his brow furrowed again. "Maybe they're lost."

"Sure they're lost," sister-in-law sang. She sniggered; she was enjoying herself. Nineteenth Lesson, translate these sentences: *So long as he holds the map the wrong way up, he will never find the house. They started traveling this morning, but have still not arrived.* It seemed a hopeless business, trying to get anywhere, and the textbook confessed it. I was not really learning Arabic, of course, I was too impatient; I was leafing through the lessons, looking for phrases that might be useful if I could say them. We stayed long, long into the evening, waiting for the men who had never intended to come; in the end, wounded and surly, Ijaz escorted us to the door. I heard my husband take in a breath of wet air. "We'll never have to do it again," I consoled him. In the car, "You have to feel for him," I said. No answer.

December 13th: My diary records that I am oppressed by "the darkness, the ironing and the smell of drains." I could no longer play my *Eroica* tape as it had twisted itself up in the innards of the machine. In my idle moments I had summarized forty chapters of *Oliver Twist*⁸ for the use of my upstairs neighbor. Three days later I

was “horribly unstable and restless,” and reading the *Lyttelton/Hart-Davis Letters*.⁹ Later that week I was cooking with my neighbor Yasmin. I recorded “an afternoon of graying pain.” All the same, Ijaz was out of the country and I realized I breathed easier when I was not anticipating the ring of the doorbell. December 16th, I was reading *The Philosopher’s Pupil*¹ and visiting my own student upstairs. Munira took my forty chapter summaries, flicked through them, yawned, and switched on the TV. “What is a workhouse?” I tried to explain about the English poor law, but her expression glazed; she had never heard of poverty. She yelled out for her servant, an ear-splitting yell, and the girl—a beaten-down Indonesian—brought in Munira’s daughter for my diversion. A heavy, solemn child, she was beginning to walk, or stamp, under her own power, her hands flailing for a hold on the furniture. She would fall on her bottom with a grunt, haul herself up again by clutching the sofa; the cushions slid away from her, she tumbled backward, banged on the floor her large head with its corkscrew curls, and lay there wailing. Munira laughed at her: “White nigger, isn’t it?” She didn’t get her flat nose from my side, she explained. Or those fat lips either. It’s my husband’s people, but of course, they’re blaming me.

January 2nd 1984: We went to a dark little restaurant off Khalid bin Wahlid Street, where we were seated behind a lattice screen in the “family area.” In the main part of the room men were dining with each other. The business of eating out was more a gesture than a pleasure; you would gallop through the meal, because without wine and its rituals there was nothing to slow it, and the waiters, who had no concept that a man and woman might eat together for more than sustenance, prided themselves on picking up your plate as soon as you had finished and slapping down another, and rushing you back onto the dusty street. That dusty orange glare, perpetual, like the lighting of a bad sci-fi film; the constant snarl and rumble of traffic; I had become afraid of traffic accidents, which were frequent, and every time we drove out at night I saw the gaping spaces beneath bridges and flyovers; they seemed to me like amphitheatres in which the traffic’s casualties enacted, flickering, their final moments.

Sometimes, when I set foot outside the apartment, I started to shake. I blamed it on the drugs I was taking; the dose had been increased again. When I saw the other wives they didn't seem to be having these difficulties. They talked about paddling pools and former lives they had led in Hong Kong. They got up little souk² trips to buy jewelry, so that sliding on their scrawny tanned arms their bracelets clinked and chimed, like ice cubes knocking together. On Valentine's Day we went to a cheese party; you had to imagine the wine. I was bubbling with happiness; a letter had come from William IV Street, to tell me my novel had been sold. Spearing his Edam³ with a cocktail stick, my husband's boss loomed over me: "Hubby tells me you're having a book published. That must be costing him a pretty penny."

Ijaz, I assumed, was still in America. After all, he had his marital affairs to sort out, as well as business. He doesn't reappear in the diary till March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, when I recorded, "Phone call, highly unwelcome." For politeness, I asked how business was; as ever, he was evasive. He had something else to tell me: "I've got rid of Mary-Beth. She's gone."

"What about the children?"

"Saleem is staying with me. The girl, it doesn't matter. She can have her if she wants."

"Ijaz, look, I must say good-bye. I hear the doorbell." What a lie.

"Who is it?"

What, did he think I could see through the wall? For a second I was so angry I forgot there was only a phantom at the door.

"Perhaps my neighbor," I said meekly.

"See you soon," Ijaz said.

I decided that night I could no longer bear it. I did not feel I could bear even one more cup of coffee together. But I had no means of putting an end to it, and for this I excused myself, saying I had been made helpless by the society around me. I was not able to bring myself to speak to Ijaz directly. I still had no power in me to snub him. But the mere thought of him made me squirm inside with shame, at my own general cluelessness, and at the sad little lies he

had told to misrepresent his life, and the situation into which we had blundered; I thought of the sister-in-law, her peach chiffon and her curled lip.

Next day when my husband came home I sat him down and instigated a conversation. I asked him to write to Ijaz and ask him not to call on me anymore, as I was afraid that the neighbors had noticed his visits and might draw the wrong conclusion: which, as he knew, could be dangerous to us all. My husband heard me out. You need not write much, I pleaded, he will get the point. I should be able to sort this out for myself, but I am not allowed to, it is beyond my power, or it seems to be. I heard my own voice, jangled, grating; I was doing what I had wriggled so hard to avoid, I was sheltering behind the mores of this society, off-loading the problem I had created for myself in a way that was feminine, weak and spiteful.

My husband saw all this. Not that he spoke. He got up, took his shower. He lay in the rattling darkness, in the bedroom where the wooden shutters blocked out the merest chink of afternoon glare. I lay beside him. The evening prayer call woke me from my doze. My husband had risen to write the letter. I remember the snap of the lock as he closed it in his briefcase.

I have never asked him what he put in the letter, but whatever it was it worked. There was nothing—not a chastened note pushed under the door, nor a regretful phone call. Just silence. The diary continues but Ijaz exits from it. I read *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Present & The Past*, and *The Bottle Factory Outing*.⁴ The company's post office box went missing, with all the incoming mail in it. You would think a post box was a fixed thing and wouldn't go wandering of its own volition, but it was many days before it was found, at a distant post office, and I suppose a post box can move if furniture can. We drifted toward our next leave. May 10th, we attended a farewell party for an escapee whose contract was up. "Fell over while dancing and sprained my ankle." May 11th: With my ankle strapped up, "watched *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*."⁵

I had much more time to serve in Jeddah. I didn't leave finally till the spring of 1986. By that time we had been rehoused twice more,

shuttled around the city and finally outside it to a compound off the freeway. I never heard of my visitor again. The woman trapped in the flat on the corner of Al-Suror Street seems a relative stranger, and I ask myself what she should have done, how she could have managed it better. She should have thrown those drugs away, for one thing; they are nowadays a medication of last resort, because everybody knows they make you frightened, deaf and sick. But about Ijaz? She should never have opened the door in the first place. Discretion is the better part of valor; she's always said that. Even after all this time it's hard to grasp exactly what happened. I try to write it as it occurred but I find myself changing the names to protect the guilty. I wonder if Jeddah left me forever off-kilter in some way, tilted from the vertical and condemned to see life skewed. I can never be certain that doors will stay closed and on their hinges, and I do not know, when I turn out the lights at night, whether the house is quiet as I left it or the furniture is frolicking in the dark.

2009, 2014

Endnotes

- Note 1: Saudi Arabian port city on the Red Sea and modern commercial hub.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Temporarily assigned.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dress shoes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: March associated with the English Civil War (1642–51).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Islamic holy month of fasting, introspection, and prayer. "Noon prayer": Muslims typically pray at five designated times each day.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Novel (1979) by Australian writer Patrick White (1912–1990).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Birthplace of Muhammad and Islam's holiest city. All able Muslims are expected to make pilgrimage to Mecca at some point in their lives.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Third Symphony by German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Feast day marking the end of Ramadan.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Full-body robe (Arabic).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Elegant (French).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: British directory for aspiring writers.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Satirical portrait by the Flemish artist [Quentin Matsys](#) (1466–1530), also referred to as *A Grotesque Old Woman*.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Coastal resort area of Jeddah.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Overpass.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Low-ranking female domestic servant.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Novel (1838) by English writer Charles Dickens (1812–1870).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Correspondence between English literature teacher George Lyttelton (1883–1962) and former student Rupert Hart-Davis (1907–1999), published in six volumes between 1978 and 1984.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Novel (1983) by Irish-born English writer Iris Murdoch (1919–1999).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Open-air marketplace.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Dutch cheese.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Novels by American writer Philip Roth (1933–2018) and English writers Ivy Compton-Burnett (1884–1969) and Beryl Bainbridge (1932–2010).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: 1974 American slasher film.[Return to reference 5](#)

BORN-DIGITAL LITERATURE

Born-digital literature refers to a subset of literary works that are written on a computer and generally meant to be read on a computer. Many such works are programmed in addition to being written; use sound, motion, and interactivity; and have historically been published on floppy disk, CD-ROM, and online (hence, born-digital). They cannot appear on the printed page without sacrificing some aspect of their essential form and meaning. Other born-digital works begin on a computer, but appear in print and thematize the process of crossing over from screen to page. Their composition and presentation reflect a deep awareness of the media formats in which they appear.

We might think of these works as metamedial rather than metafictional. Whereas a metafictional work self-consciously references its status as a work of fiction, a metamedial work references the media in which it was written or appears—whether it be a paper book, a computer screen, or a particular social media platform. Further, metamedial works do not take the material qualities of language for granted. They experiment with the look and sound of letters and the speed and arrangement of words across print, audio, and video. In various ways, they invite readers of literature to think about how the specificities of print and digital environments affect their experience of the work.

Many of the writers in this cluster invoke or rewrite canonical texts from earlier periods of literary history. This is no accident. Writers wishing to prove that digital media can indeed be literary media draw on their knowledge of the canon and reinvent old forms using new tools and techniques. Take the poetry of Kamau Brathwaite and Caroline Bergvall, for example. When Brathwaite began writing poetry on an Apple Macintosh computer in the late 1980s, he coined the phrase “Sycorax video style” (SVS) to describe his visual exploration of the different typefaces and symbols

available through its word-processing program. Named for Caliban's mother, an unseen character who is also a witch and foil to Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, SVS is characterized by pixelated letters, keyboard art (drawings made from symbols available on a keyboard), and variable typefaces, fonts, and font sizes to bring a screen aesthetic to paper. With SVS, Brathwaite reverses expectations of technological progress. He brings graphic design into his writing to excavate the deep past of colonial violence and to compare computer screens to medieval forms of media, such as the scroll and the illuminated manuscript. Poet and sound artist Caroline Bergvall follows Brathwaite in using computer-mediated poetry to evoke the history of the English language as well as the radically different sensory experiences of reading aloud and silent reading. "The Franker Tale" (2011), a contemporary reimagining of Chaucer's "The Franklin's Tale," blends the sounds and spellings of Middle English and modern English to show proximities in the regulation of women's bodies over time. Bergvall further remixes found documents with original writing in a literary version of the common web-based practice of copy and paste.

The earliest computer-generated poetry descends from avant-garde traditions of European modernism. German mathematician Theo Lutz created *Stochastic Texts* (1959) on a Zuse22 computer. He designed a Fortran program where the input was carefully selected words from Franz Kafka's *The Castle* and the output was a series of random combinations of those words. Lutz, like the mathematically inclined French poet Raymond Queneau, incorporated randomness, chance, and permutation into the making of poetry. Programmed and recombinant poetry influenced the development of kinetic poetry or poetry that moves across a screen and consequently cannot be read on paper.

The prolific Canadian poet bpNichol created *First Screening* (1984) on an Apple IIe computer in the BASIC programming language. These kinetic poems operate in the borderlands of text and image. Visuals puns, moving strings of words, and the use of letters as variables draw attention to how the changing physical

inscription and pacing of a poem adds to its many possible meanings. The kinetic poetry of bpNichol recalls the visual and typographical play of French symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé and the *Blast* manifesto (see the cluster on Modernist Manifestos earlier in this volume) and looks forward to the work of Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries (YHCHI). The group, based in Seoul, South Korea, consists of artist Young-Hae Chang and her partner, Marc Voge. YHCHI programmed the powerful “BUST DOWN THE DOOR!” (2000) and “TRAVELING TO UTOPIA” (2012) with Flash Animation, a software platform of historical importance to developing interactive media on the World Wide Web. YHCHI use the resources of Flash to question the reputation of the internet as a highly accessible or “democratic” medium that levels cultural hierarchies. Their kinetic poems purposely deny users interactivity and create jarring experiences that suggest digital tools may take away more freedom than they give. The high-speed sequencing of frames, shockingly large Monaco typeface, layered multilingual writing, and pulsating music disorient the reader and defamiliarize the visual organization of the computer screen.

The World Wide Web was developed and launched by British computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee in 1989, and in the 1990s, first-generation digital fiction was dominated by American writers of hypertext narratives. *afternoon, a story* (1990) by Michael Joyce, and Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* (1995), a rewriting of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, brought the hyperlinked, networked structure native to the web into this new literary form of storytelling. Hypertext fiction offered multiple reading paths through a story, and its labyrinthine structure would in turn influence twenty-first-century experiments with typography and page design in book-based novels such as Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000) and Adam Thirlwell’s *Kapow!* (2012). Ali Smith’s novel *How to Be Both* (2014), an excerpt of which is included here, was simultaneously published in two print editions, each presenting the narrative in a different order. Print readers received one of the two versions at random while ebook readers were given both versions.

Since 2010, born-digital fiction has spread to large social media platforms where authors engage with internet genres like the tweet and the meme, launch collaborative writing projects, and blend aspects of literary publishing with public performance. The fiction of David Mitchell and Teju Cole reflects the migration of writers without specialized programming skills into the sphere of digital literature. Mitchell published his short story "The Right Sort" on Twitter (rebranded in 2023 as X) serially over one week (July 14–20, 2014) and followed a strict timetable of two batches of tweets per day at one tweet per minute. He welcomed the novelty of writing prose under the constraint of 140 characters (the maximum length of a tweet at that time) and incorporated the rhythm of tweet release into a story that used timing and enjambment to convey the changing mental state of its protagonist.

Writing from Lagos, Nigeria, Cole took to Twitter to examine how modes of attention shaped the relationship between political centers of power and their peripheries. "Seven Short Stories about Drones" (2013) offers a new twist on postcolonial strategies of writing back to the canon. It unfolds through a series of seven tweets, each of which recontextualizes the first line of a classic novel in light of drone strikes and civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Pakistan. If literature is the medium through which readers refine their faculties of attention and empathy, then Cole suggests it might be weaponized against apathy in the face of atrocity. "Hafiz" (2014), which centers on eyewitness accounts of an emergency situation, cleverly harnesses Twitter's reputation as a platform for breaking news and citizen journalism. The short story was written by Cole alone, but its sentences were distributed across a group of his followers who tweeted them from their accounts. Cole then retweeted (copied) his followers' tweets so that the complete story appeared on his profile page. The orchestration of "Hafiz" made ingenious use of Twitter's retweet function to transform an individually authored story into a collaborative performance that blurred the boundaries between fiction and news.

Readers can experience the full effect of kinetic poetry through an ebook, which, unlike a print format, enables access to the audio and video features of born-digital literature. In the case of social media-based literature, access is more complicated. Twitter fiction, on its native platform, blended into the news feeds of different users so that each reader would encounter a story or a fragment of the story through the prism of their personalized feed. While the Norton Anthology ebook cannot replicate the experience of reading on Twitter, it does remind us how all literature that lasts is inevitably read outside of its original context. This fact does not diminish the value of the encounter, but raises fruitful questions about the relationship between text and context, between reading and viewing a poem, and between experiencing a fictional work in real time on a social media platform and reading it later in its archived form. To make some of the literature in this section more accessible, we invite you to move from page to screen.

With twentieth- and twenty-first-century advances in digital technology, desktop computers, laptops, game consoles, tablets, and smartphones have become indispensable tools for work and play. Even if preservation and display pose a challenge as file formats change and become obsolete, born-digital literature proves that computing devices have left a vital mark on the arts of the English language. Through their inspired use of word-processing software, programming languages, graphic design, and social media interfaces, these authors make reading and writing feel new again.

KAMAU BRATHWAITE

In the excerpt below from *ConVERSations* with poet Nathaniel Mackey, the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite (1930–2020) (see headnote earlier in this volume) introduces Sycorax Video Style, a mode of writing that combines technological and typographical experimentation with the postcolonial desire to reimagine characters from the canon of English literature. Sycorax is the name of Caliban's mother in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Although she never appears on stage, characters refer to her as a witch. Brathwaite reclaims Sycorax as a mother who inspires his poetic creativity and provides an alternative figure of authority to Prospero. Sycorax Video Style uses pixelated letters, computer typefaces, and line drawings to approximate the appearance of a television or computer screen on the printed page. The result is an experimental form of writing that resists the standardization of literary language on the page.

After he began writing in Sycorax Video Style, Brathwaite encountered difficulties with publishers unable or unwilling to deviate from standard formats. The style of *ConVERSations* reproduced here exemplifies the style as Brathwaite wished it to appear. The visual appearance of the poem "Letter Sycorax" offers a more subdued version of Sycorax Video Style. In the poem Brathwaite imagines Sycorax's computer as an alternative to Prospero's book. The computer, despite being an emblem of Western technology, allows Brathwaite to write "in light" and to improvise upon his past poetics of decolonization.

[On Sycorax Video Style]

The publishers are struggling with it because what happen during this time was not only - for mwe - a 'revolution' into surrealism, if you like, or magical realism - I call it dream status or dreamstorie - [to Nate] *you would know more about this than I do* - but I suppose dreams are a healing process. .

But the very concept of writing has alter, and it's as if I'm gone back to the Middle Ages, in a way, and I'm tryin to create those things that they did - what-do-you-call-them? Scrolls? that kind of tone. And the computer gives me that opportunity. To release the pen from the fist of my broeken hand and begin what I call my '*video-style*', in which I try to make the words themselves live off - away from - the 'page', so you can see - *is this true? does this make sense - or does it simply try to mean what i mean?* - like *see their sound* - technology taking us 'back', I suppose, to the Urals - which is why I continue to think of the MiddleAges - what was 'happening' in Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Islamic world of the **ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS** when the written word could still *hear itself speak*, as it were And beyond that, even to the possibility of

On Sycorax Video Style: This is a selection from ConVERsations with Nathaniel Mackey, a book based on a transcript of a public discussion between the two poets. Mackey (b. 1947) is referred to as "Nate." Throughout, Brathwaite plays with the sound and sight of words as he brings in the informal style and syntax of spoken Caribbean English.

Sycorax: In Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Sycorax is a character mentioned but not seen. She is the mother of Caliban, who has become important in postcolonial Caribbean literature as a symbol for the colonial subject who has absorbed the colonizer's culture and language but rejects its authority.

mwe: derived from Haitian Creole, “mwe” in Brathwaite’s lexicon signifies a combination of “me” and “we” and the retention of individuality within community.

surrealism: an artistic movement focusing on the unconscious and on creating dream-like scenes.

magical realism: a literary movement originating in Latin America; it blends fantastical elements into the realist novel. Major authors associated with the movement include Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980) and Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014).

Middle Ages: period from the 5th to 15th centuries, between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance.

scrolls: Gutenberg invented the printing press sometime around 1440; this set in motion the printing of books as we know them today. Prior to this, scrolls, made of rolled pieces of parchment or other material, were used for writing and reading. Today, “scrolling” refers to the navigation of computer screens.

broeken: deliberately alternative spelling for “broken.”

Urals: a mountain range in Western Russia; commonly referred to as the boundary between Europe and Asia.

illuminated manuscripts: hand-written books with elaborate painted decorations, including borders, large chapter letters, and miniature and full-pages pictures. The majority of them were produced in the Middle Ages.

HIEROGLYPHICS

- Egypt, Maya, Aztec - and 'beyond' that even unto *timehri* before fire. It involves a process of video-thinking and a presentation - a representation - of illuminated scrolls which the present concept of the 4½" x 7½" margin **book** with a certain uniform **face**, won't interest and therefore can't/won't/won't entertain - hence my struggle with publishers and printers over the presentation - the representation - of all my new 'Sycorax video-style' stuff: **DreamStories** [ds], **The Zea Mexican Diary** [zmd], **Trench Town Rock** [ttr] and especially **DreamStories** which is the nearest of these texts to dream and why in the end I have to publish **BarabajanPoem** (s) and later **MR** [Magic(al) Realism] myself [Savacou North 1994 & 1998; tho the printer succeeded in well **fuckin** up - even tho is 'print ready' - its pagination + the signatures, so that it wasn't *ready* when i needin it etc etc etc - *an dat's basically because e tink e know better dan mwe about MU-RAL*]

* * *

HIEROGLYPHICS: writing that uses pictures as characters, rather than a letter-based alphabet. The Egyptian, Mayan, and Aztec empires all used different forms of hieroglyphics.

timehri: Guyanese Amerindian word that means "paintings and drawings on a rock," or "petroglyph." Brathwaite drew on concepts from Indigenous languages as a counterpoint to European thought.

face: typeface. Brathwaite suggests that the standard-size book with uniform typeface cannot adequately represent Sycorax Video Style.

Letter Sycorax

forest [Nzinga](#)

1

Dear mamma

*i writin yu dis letter/**wha?**
guess what! pun a computer o/kay?
like i [jine](#) de mercantilists!*

well not quite!

*i mean de same way [dem tief](#)/in gun
power from [sheena](#) & [taken we blues](#) &*

gone

■■■

**say
wha? get on wid de same ole**

story?

okay
okay
okay

okay

if yu cyaan beat prospero
whistle

No mamma!

is not one a dem pensive tings like ibm or
bang & ovid
nor anyting glori. ous like dat!

but is one a de bess tings since cicero o
kay?

it have key
board &

evva

ting. like dat ole
reminton yu have pun top de war. drobe up
there ketchin duss

only wid dis one yu na ave to benn dung over
to out out
de mistake dem wid white liquid paper. de
papyrus

ribbid & soff


before it drei up flakey &
crink. like yu was paintin yu house



um doan even nuse no paper yu does have to

roll
pun dat blk [rollin pin](#) like yu rollin dough pun
a flatten

& does go off ping pun de right hann wing a
de paper
when de clatterin words start to fly & fling
like a [ping. wing](#)

■

wid dis  now
long before yu cud say [jackie robb](#)
inson or [rt-d2](#) or shout

wre 
dis ya [obeah](#) blo 
get a whole whole para
graph write up &

blink
pun a black
bird

like dat indonesian fella in [star](#)
[trek](#)
where dem is wear dem permanent wrinkle up
grey

& white flannel cost
ume like dem gettin ready to
jogg

but dem sittin dung dere in such silence a
rome

it not turn
in a hair pun dem [wig/wam](#) &

[hack](#)/in out hack/in hack/in all sorta [back](#)
up & [read](#)
[out](#) & fail

out & think &
it even have [trash](#)
can for garbage from all part/icles a de gal.

a ~~x~~ y

&
mamma

a doan really know how [pascal](#) & [co.](#)
[balt apple](#) & [cogito ergo sum](#)
come to [h/invent](#) all these tings since

de rice & fall a de roman empire
& how capitalism & slaveley like it putt
christianity
on ice

so dem cd always open dat cole
smokin door a hell when dem ready for [ash or](#)
[a psalm](#)
[sangridge or](#)
[choke](#)

Why i cyaan nuse me hann & crawl

***up de white like i use
to?***

***since when i kin
type?***

***dats what i tryin to tell
ya!***

*yu know me cyaan
neither flat
foot pun de key*

*boards like
say
[charlie chap](#) dance/in*

*far
less touch
tapp/in like [bo.](#)*

[jangles](#)

*walk/in doun [chauncery](#)
[lane](#)*

yu hear/in me mwa?

*but i
mwangles!*



a mean
a nat [forwardin](#) wid star
wars

nor sing
songin no [bionicle](#)
songs or like [sputnik](#) &

chips
goin bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep
into de [peloponnesian wars](#)

but i
mwangles

2

Why a callin it

x?

a doan write.
ly know
but yes.
taday when a was tell.

in a ceratin girl
frenn about

it/she kinda look at i funn.
y like if

she tink i has ~~x~~er~~x~~es or aids

so she soffly soffly silk.
in i off like if i is sick.

ly or sorrow or
souse

but is like what i try.
in to sen/seh &

seh about muse.
in computer

& mouse &
learn.

in prospero ling.
go

&
ting

not fe dem/not fe dem
de way caliban

done

but fe we
fe a-we

for nat one a we shd response if prospero get
curse

wid im own
curser

though um not like when covetous ride miss
praedial
mule


but is like we still start
where we start/in out start/in out start/in
out start/in

out
since menelek was a bwoy
& why is dat &

what is de bess way to say so/so it doan sounn
like

brigg
flatts or her. vokitz nor de

n.
san cantos nor de souf sea bible

nor like ink. le & yarico & de anglo sa  on
chronicles

&
mamma!

a fine
a cyaan get nutten

write
a cyaan get nutten really

rite
while a stannin up hey in me years & like me
inside a me shadow

like de mahn still mekkin mwe walk up de
slope dat e slide
in black down de whole long curve a de arch

i

pell

a

go

some
times smile.
in nice

some
times like e really laughin after we &
some
times like e helpin we up while e push.

in we black dung
again

like when yu rumbellin
dung
into de under

grounn

on one a dem move.
in stair.
crace &

*like yu fuh.
get like yu wallet or some
ting like*

*dat
& yu cyaan nevva turn
back*

*nor
walk back up
nor*

*even run back
up*

outta there

■

*cause de stair.
crace
crazy &*

*creak.
in & snake
skinn. in*

it

*down
down
down*

&

how. ever

yu

runnin up runnin up runnin up runnin up

it still

goin down

goin down

goin down

goin down

like sa.

hell

like sy.

phyllis

like

the edges of the desert

&

guess who down dey at de top

a de line wid dante & dodo & julie &

nappo & nix & adolph

kaisermann be. havin like one a de boys

but idi & splash & pol

pot

&

a whole rash a economists pullin we up by we

boot

straps & smo. kin

pot

bellied ha/ha/ha/ha [havana cigars](#)

*& [grand master sergeant doe](#) &
brand new imperial corporals smilin of*

*[cordite](#) &
leather*

*strap & [vd & vid.](#)
eo*

&

*the
striped eyes of [nigerian tigritude](#)
& like what yu say happ.*

*enin inna
libraria*

*all a dem brooks of the dead
&*

mamma

*a know yu can plant lettice & ice but yu
cyaan eat [ikebana](#)*

*Yet a sittin dung here in front a dis stone
face*

*eeee
lectrical mallet into me*

fist

*chipp/in dis poem onta dis tab.
let*

*chiss. ellin dark.
ness writin in light*

*like i is a some. is a some. is a some
body.*

a **x**
pert or some

*thing like [moses](#) or [aaron](#) or one a dem
dyaaam [isra](#)
[light](#)*

&
mamma!

1993

Glossary

[Letter Sycorax](#)

from the 1993 New Directions edition; an earlier version, titled "X/Self's Xth Letters from the Thirteen Provinces" (Oxford University Press, 1987), had standard typography and explanatory notes, both of which Brathwaite resisted and subsequently removed.

[Nzinga](#)

legendary queen of the African kingdoms of Ndonga and Matamba (modern-day Angola), renowned for winning an anticolonial war against the Portuguese and for providing refuge for African resistance.

[jine](#)

join (West Indian English).

[dem tief](#)

them thief (West Indian English).

[sheena](#)

China (*Brathwaite's note, Oxford edition*).

[taken we blues](#)

echoing lines protesting the White appropriation of Black culture for profit in "Note on Commercial Theater" by Langston Hughes: "You've done taken my blues and gone" and "Yep, you done taken my blues and gone."

[yu cyaan](#)

you cannot.

[prospero](#)

Shakespeare's plantation owner (*Brathwaite's note*); main character in *The Tempest* who uses his magical powers to enslave Caliban.

[tings](#)

things.

[ibm](#)

IBM—American technology company; dominant in the personal computer market at the time this poem was written.

[bang & ovid](#)

Bang & Olufsen, a Danish company known for luxury electronics; punning on Ovid, Roman poet and fixture of the classical canon.

[cicero](#)

unit of measurement used in early European typography and a family of computer fonts, named for Marcus Tullius Cicero, Roman statesman and writer.

[evva](#)

every.

[reminton](#)

Remington; an early typewriter.

[benn dung](#)

"bend down," with play on "dung."

[white liquid paper](#)

also known as White-Out, an opaque liquid used to correct mistakes in typewritten texts.

[papyrus](#)

ancient paperlike material.

[ribbid & soff](#)

ribbed and soft.

["rollin" "ping"](#)

a typewriter uses rollers to hold and advance paper, rings a bell ("ping") when approaching the end of the page, and clatters when its keys are depressed.

[ping. wing](#)

pun on the computer font pingwing.

[jackie robb-inson](#)

Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play Major League Baseball; see also the expression "Before I could say Jack Robinson," meaning something happened very fast.

[rt-d2](#)

R2-D2, a robot in the *Star Wars* films.

[obeah](#)

a system of spiritual practices in the African diaspora of the Caribbean and South America.

[star trek](#)

American science fiction television show; it is unclear the actor or character to whom Brathwaite refers.

[star trek](#)

American science fiction television show; it is unclear the actor or character to whom Brathwaite refers.

[wig/wam](#)

play on wig and wigwam, a Native American dwelling with a domed roof, and on "hairpin turn."

[hack, back up, readout, trash can](#)

computer-related terms.

[hack, back up, readout, trash can](#)

computer-related terms.

[hack, back up, readout, trash can](#)

computer-related terms.

[hack, back up, readout, trash can](#)

computer-related terms.

[hack, back up, readout, trash can](#)

computer-related terms.

[pascal](#)

programming language, named after French philosopher Blaise Pascal, who created an adding machine that was a precursor to the calculator.

[co.balt](#)

mineral used in some batteries for portable electronics.

[apple](#)

computer company founded in 1976.

[cogito ergo sum](#)

"I think, therefore I am" (Latin), attributed to philosopher René Descartes.

[h/invent](#)

approximates West Indian pronunciation.

[ash or / a psalm / sangridge or / choke](#)

play on Ash Wednesday or Palm Sunday, and on sandwich or coke (and choke also as "stifle").

[ash or / a psalm / sangridge or / choke](#)

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play on Ash Wednesday or Palm Sunday, and on sandwich or coke (and choke also as "stifle").

[ash or / a psalm / sangridge or / choke](#)

play on Ash Wednesday or Palm Sunday, and on sandwich or coke (and choke also as "stifle").

[charlie chap](#)

Charlie Chaplin, English silent film actor.

[bojangles](#)

nickname of Bill Robinson, American tap dancer and entertainer, described by Brathwaite as an “underground/submerged teacher and choreographer of many (more famous) in the Fred Astaire/Shirley Temple era.”

[chauncery lane](#)

Not the London walkway, but downtown Kingston (Jamaica) reggae-making and recording center (*Brathwaite’s note*).

[chauncery lane](#)

Not the London walkway, but downtown Kingston (Jamaica) reggae-making and recording center (*Brathwaite’s note*).

[farwardin](#)

possibly a play on “Farvardin,” the Persian name for the first month of the Solar Hijri calendar.

[bionicle](#)

bionics is the combination of biological bodies by technological engineering.

[sputnik](#)

the first satellite launched into space, in 1957 by the Soviet Union.

[peloponnesian wars](#)

wars between Athens and Sparta (431–404 B.C.E.), which ended democracy in Athens.

[xerxes](#)

possibly the stylized x’s here stand for an “h” and “p,” making this herpes, another sexually transmitted disease. “Xerxes” is also a Persian king who invaded ancient Greece.

[aids](#)

AIDS, an immune system disorder caused by the HIV virus.

[praedial](#)

relating to or attached to the land; used to differentiate enslaved people who worked in the field from those who worked in the home (nonpraedial).

[menelek](#)

Menelik I, considered by Rastafarians the founder of the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia.

[brigg flatts](#)

Briggflatts, 1966 poem by British poet Basil Bunting.

[brigg flatts](#)

Briggflatts, 1966 poem by British poet Basil Bunting.

[her. vokitz](#)

M. J. Herskovits, American cultural anthropologist whose books trace African culture in African American culture.

[π san cantos](#)

mathematical sign for the constant pi. With "san," this is *The Pisan Cantos*, part of poet Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* (1948).

[souf sea bible](#)

play on the South Sea Bubble, the 1720 speculation bubble of British investors in the South Sea Company that traded in enslaved people.

[ink. le and yarico](#)

Inkle and Yarico, a 1787 comic opera in which Inkle, a British trader, is shipwrecked in the West Indies and falls in love with a Caribbean woman, Yarico.

[anglo saxon chronicles](#)

records of English history from the 9th century.

[e slide / in black down](#)

allusion to the myth of Sisyphus, condemned in Hades forever to roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down.

[e slide / in black down](#)

allusion to the myth of Sisyphus, condemned in Hades forever to roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down.

[arch i pell a go](#)

archipelago, a group of islands, like those in the Caribbean.

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[arch i pell a go](#)

archipelago, a group of islands, like those in the Caribbean.

[dante](#)

Dante Alighieri, Italian poet who described an elaborate hell in the *Divine Comedy*.

[dodo](#)

an extinct species of flightless bird.

[julie](#)

Julius Caesar.

[nappo](#)

Napoleon Bonaparte.

[nix](#)

Richard Nixon.

[adolph kaisermann](#)

Adolph Hitler.

[adolph kaisermann](#)

Adolph Hitler.

[idi](#)

Idi Amin, brutal Ugandan dictator.

[splash](#)

possibly Mao Zedong, who swam across the Yangtze River at the age of 72.

[pol pot](#)

Pol Pot, Cambodian dictator who perpetrated genocide.

[pol pot](#)

Pol Pot, Cambodian dictator who perpetrated genocide.

[havana cigars](#)

Havana is the capital of Cuba, known for its cigars. In 1959 revolutionaries overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and established communism in the country.

[grand master sergeant doe](#)

Samuel Doe, a master sergeant in the Armed Forces of Liberia who staged a military coup in 1980.

[cordite](#)

a propellant used as a replacement for gunpowder, particularly by the British Army.

[vd and vid.](#)

play on VD, venereal disease, and *vid.*, the abbreviation of the Latin *vide* ("see").

[nigerian tigritude](#)

allusion to Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka's declaration that "A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude—he pounces," meant to rebut the concept of "négritude," which posited an essential Blackness.

[ikebana](#)

the Japanese art of flower arrangement.

[moses](#)

a prophet in the Old Testament who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt across the Red Sea to establish the Promised Land.

[aaron](#)

the brother of Moses; also a prophet.

[isra light](#)

Israelite. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were tribes that lived in Canaan.

[isra light](#)

Israelite. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were tribes that lived in Canaan.

[co.balt](#)

mineral used in some batteries for portable electronics.

[bojangles](#)

nickname of Bill Robinson, American tap dancer and entertainer, described by Brathwaite as an "underground/submerged teacher and choreographer of many (more famous) in the Fred Astaire/Shirley Temple era."

[sahel\(I\).](#)

transitional region between coastal West Africa and the Sahara Desert.

[sahel\(I\).](#)

transitional region between coastal West Africa and the Sahara Desert.

[syphyllis](#)

syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease.

[syphyllis](#)

syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease.

[Sycorax](#)

Caliban's mother in *The Tempest*, described as a witch. In postcolonial Caribbean literature, Caliban is a figure for the colonial subject who has absorbed the colonizer's culture and language but rejects its authority.

CAROLINE BERGVALL

Born in Germany in 1962 to a Norwegian father and French mother, Caroline Bergvall was raised in Switzerland, France, and Norway. She studied at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, received her M.Phil. from the University of Warwick in Britain and her Ph.D. from the Dartington College of Arts, where she directed the Performance Writing program from 1995 to 2000. She served as visiting professor at Kings College London from 2017 to 2020 and remains based in London. Bergvall's poetry crosses linguistic and media boundaries. Multilingualism and translation feature in many of her works, and she makes use of historical languages, such as Middle English, as well as modern languages in her collections *Meddle English* (2011), *Drift* (2014), and *Alisoun Sings* (2019). Her performance pieces feature audio recordings, sound distortion, and installations (often in galleries and museums) that draw attention to the relationship between speaking, hearing, and writing across cultural difference. Racial and especially gendered embodiment emerge as major themes of her work in its turn toward the particularities of the voice, dialect, and accent.

Bergvall's performance writing emphasizes the different media in which words may appear. Her allusive poetry puts literary language into conversation with other textual forms drawn from the history of recording technologies ranging from handwriting to hypertext. In "The Franker Tale," she remixes passages from "The Franklin's Tale" and "The Summoner's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer with quotations from the *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women* (1995). In the letter, the Pope praised women for fulfilling the traditional roles of wife and mother while also entering the workforce. He also reaffirmed the Catholic Church's stance against abortion even when pregnancy is the result of rape. Bergvall uses these sources and their multilingual underpinnings to chronicle, in frank terms, the global history of sexual violence against women.

The Franker Tale¹ (Deus Hic,² 2)

Following tweye³ two breathing crises
and with a tube placidly placed placed
in his esophagus, the papal Pope in Rome⁴
global preacher most powerful suprem
o was not in good form
5 when the seeds of death's deeth⁵
one by one finally popped in hym him
irreparably tearing the throat and the skin's hem.

Back at the Tavern in London
the dear vinolent⁶ drunken queer
10 painter portreytour⁷
knew all along once ones
the hol hole of the hooly blessed
Sire Father's muth⁸ mouth turns
from screm⁹ to scream to smear
15 rising seated darkly in a white frame
of derk purple shoulders drenched in a shower of
gold paint
it would be tyme, it's time
to deepen the denn,¹ to coarsen the crust
and seek out the companye!

20 A new ideology of yvele evell evyl evil manaces
society
and it includes gay weddyngge jolly marriage
abortion abomination and stem cell studie research
wrote the papal he hey in his bestselling scriptures
book,
*Memory and Identity.*²

25 The Pope's noisy mouth had a mutt
and a deceptively brooding chin.
Ones once both saufly safely shut ad eternam³
papal knights guards were quickly positioned.
30 There will be no collective revelrye,
gaiety merrymaking, drynke drinking,
daunce dancing on tabules tables
or shaking one's booty aboute around
or laying the shrewed cursed poisoned
35 yifte gift of one's maladye
this sickness our need at the feet of the lifeless
pontiff.⁴
A sea of pilgrims mourn move in sylent silent
procession
past the hooly holy cors corpse careyne⁵ carcass
arrayed laid-out
prepared solempnely in full ceremony.
But this deethly Death is short-lived.
40 Soon cries rise from Seint Peter's square:⁶
The Pope is dead! Long live the Pope's Rottweiler!⁷

*'Beloved Sisters in the Lord!'*⁸
(Letter to Women, 10 July 1995
on the occasion of the Fourth World Conference on
45 Women, Beijing)
To grope tendrely a conscience
In shrift; in prechyng is my diligence,
I walk and I walke, I fish and I fische
his word is set al myn entente to spread intent.⁹
'I greet you all most cordially, women throughout the
50 *world!*
What great appreciation must be shown to those
women who, with
a heroic love for the child they have conceived,
proceed with a

*pregnancy resulting from the injustice of rape. Here
we are thinking
of atrocities perpetrated not only in situations of war,
still so
common in the world, but also in societies which are
55 blessed by
prosperity and peace and yet are often corrupted by
a culture of
hedonistic permissiveness. The choice to have an
abortion always
remains a grave sin.'*

The wholly painter staring blankly stands between
two animal carcasses
suspended on hooks has his photograph taken.
60 Women of Bosnia! Women of Rwanda! Women of
Afghanistan!

Women of Bengal! Kurdish women! Women of
Chechnya!¹
Whan thirty tyrants, ful of cursednesse,
Hadde slayn Phidoun in Atthenes, at feste,
They comanded his daughters for tareste,
65 And bryngen hem biforn hem in despit,
Al naked, to fulfille hir foul delit, their foul delight
And in hir fadres blood their father's blood they
made them dance

Upon the pavement, God yeve hem meschaunce!²
Women and children of Sudan! Women of Colombia!
70 Kashmiri women! Punjabi women! Women of France!
Women of Britain! Women of Finland! Women of
America!³

They of Mecene leete enquire and seke
Of Lacedomye fifty maidens eke,
On whiche they wolden doon hir lecherye;⁴
75 And foul delight.

Susters and nieces! Mothers aunts and doghters!
Deus Hic! God is drunk!

At these wordes words heven rose glood⁵
the deepest soun son sound
80 a song sangen entuned intoned
a dense clamour clamor cries out
Love is leaving! the Earth quakes quaketh shakes
under their feet!
some sort of deep tabour⁶ of drum or drone.
My tale is almost doon.⁷
85 Some sawe some saying goes
some seyn some say
they say they saw des foules⁸ de crowds
en sang⁹ bleeding incensed, suster, the sky
is dreaming drumming up
90 red clouds of red blod an occean of blood ocean.
Amongst them they say they saw the joly Painter
departed
swymmes floating, and all the time farting¹
in the hote hot somer summer heat heete
with the glee of an Ashbery John.²
95 Othere say that it was the old Papa's
body finally flying free
quit of its distasteful containee.
Here endeth the Franker Tale.

2011

Endnotes

- Note 1:
In addition to remixing passages from *The Canterbury Tales* with material from the papal letter, Bergvall also mixes Latin, Middle English, English, and French. "The Franklin's Tale"

centers on the marriage between Dorigen and the knight Averagus. Both pledge to a marriage of equals in which neither exerts absolute sovereignty over the other. When a mission takes Averagus away for two years, Dorigen receives advances from the handsome squire Aurelius. Thinking it will deter Aurelius, Dorigen offers her hand on the condition that Aurelius complete a seemingly impossible task: remove threatening rocks from the coastline. When he succeeds through the services of a learned clerk, Dorigen despairs and contemplates suicide. Upon his return, Averagus tells Dorigen to keep her promise to Aurelius, but upon witnessing the nobility of Averagus, Aurelius releases Dorigen from her promise. In turn, the clerk releases Aurelius from his debt as well.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: God be here (Latin). The Friar speaks these words in "The Summoner's Tale," a satiric tale highly critical of friars (members of religious order that have taken a vow of poverty). In the tale the Friar offers false promises of prayer in return for gold.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Two (Middle English).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The pope is the head of the Catholic Church and is the bishop of Rome. The pope technically resides in Vatican City, a city entirely surrounded by the city of Rome.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Death (Middle English).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Drunken (Middle English).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Painter (Middle English).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Mouth (Middle English).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Possibly a variation on *screme* (*scream* in Middle English).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Den, or lair (Middle English).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Book published by Pope John Paul II in 2005. Included in it are his controversial claims that abortion and gay marriage belong to "a new ideology of evil, perhaps more insidious and hidden, which attempts to pit human rights against the family and against man."[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: To eternity (Latin).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: The Pope.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Corpse (Middle English).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The plaza located in front of St. Peter's Basilica, in the Vatican City.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Breed of working dog known for its strength.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The italicized sections of the poem are direct quotes from Pope John Paul II's *Letter to Women* in which he addresses the rights and dignity of women around the world. The Pope thanks women for being mothers and wives as well as for working outside the home or joining religious orders. He addresses violence against women and inequality, and reaffirms the distinct roles of men and women in society.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9:
Quotations from Chaucer's "The Summoner's Tale," in which the corrupt Friar speaks to Thomas of his calling to preach diligently, study the gospel of Peter and Paul, and spread the work of Christ. The lines from the original tale are as follows:

To grope tendrely a conscience / In shrift; in prechyng is
my diligence, / And studie in Petres wordes and in Poules. / I
walke, and fisse Cristen mennes soules, / To yelden Jhesu
Crist his propre rente; / To sprede his word is set al myn
entente.

[Return to reference 9](#)

- Note 1: A republic in Russia. "Bosnia": country in southeast Europe. "Rwanda": country in Central Africa. "Afghanistan": country in Central Asia. "Bengal": region in India and Bangladesh. "Kurdish": of the Iranian Kurd ethnic group.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Quotation from "The Franklin's Tale" regarding Phidon's daughters. Phidon, an Athenian, was killed during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants in the city. His daughters were forced to

dance naked over their father's blood but drowned themselves in a well to preserve their virginity.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Country in North America, or the American continents. "Sudan": country in northeast Africa. "Colombia": country in South America. "Kashmiri": of the Kashmir ethnic group in India. "Punjabi": from the Punjab region of Pakistan and India. "France": country in Europe. "Britain": country in Europe. "Finland": country in northern Europe.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Quotation from "The Franklin's Tale" about Greek maidens who killed themselves to preserve their virginity. This entire stanza recalls Dorigen's catalog of women who committed suicide rather than compromise their chastity.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Glide (Middle English).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Drum (Middle English).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Done (Middle English).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Crowds (French).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Blood (French).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: In "The Summoner's Tale," Thomas, the man whom the friar asks for gold, gives him a fart instead.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: John Ashbery (1927–2017), American poet.[Return to reference 2](#)

bpNICHOL

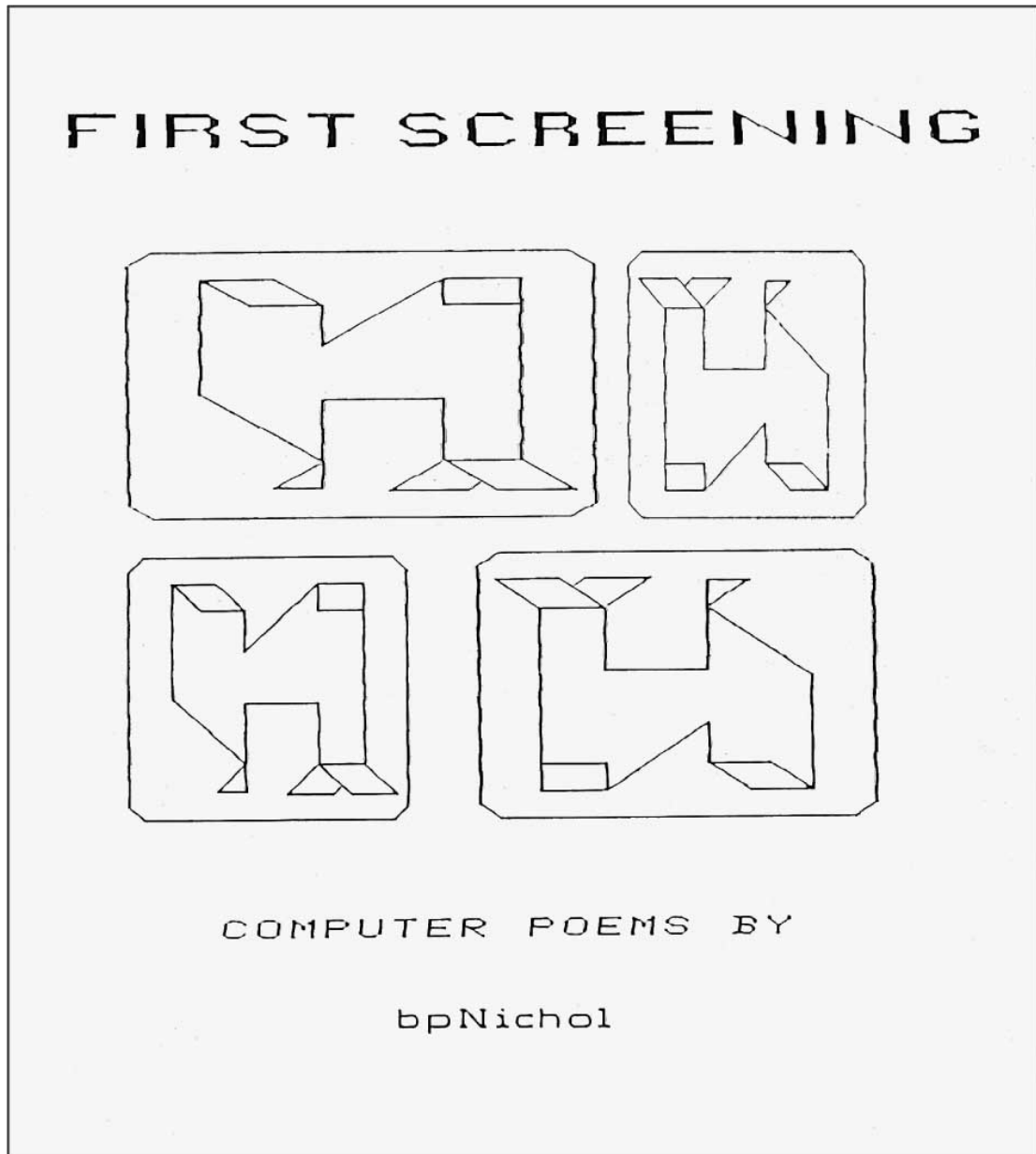
Barrie Phillip Nichol (1944–1988) was a Canadian poet, born in Vancouver, British Columbia. He first came to prominence for his concrete poetry—that is, the visual arrangement of words on a page to create pictures or abstract designs. Concrete poetry treats words like modeling clay to be sculpted and shaped, and Nichol’s playful poems of the 1960s and 1970s experimented with breaking words into their component parts (for example, letters and syllables) as well as sculpting images out of words. He won a prestigious Governor General’s Award for several poetry collections, including *The Cosmic Chef: An Evening of Concrete* (1970) and *Still Water* (1970).

Nichol described his own poetic practice as animated by the “borderblur” between image, text, and sound. When he moved from the paper page to the computer screen, he introduced the movement of words into his experiments with textual display. *First Screening* (1984) is an early example of kinetic poetry that Nichol created using an Apple IIE computer and the BASIC programming language. Over the course of a dozen poems, Nichol explores the movement of words and letters across the screen and, in the source code for the last poem, “Off Screen Romance,” even invites readers to code part of the poem themselves. Such a move reminds readers that born-digital poetry exists in at least two locations—on screen and off screen in the source code that generated it.

Nichol was a prolific writer in multiple media. Over the course of his life, he extended and revised his major work of long poetry, *The Martyrology* (1972–87; 1990–93). He also created sound poetry as part of a group called *The Four Horsemen*, and he wrote screenplays for the children’s television show *Fraggle Rock*. The following pages contain screenshots from *First Screening*. We invite you to read/view the full video of the poems in the Norton Anthology ebook in the

Norton Ebook Reader platform or doing a web search for “bpNichol,
First Screening.”

First Screening



Cover of *First Screening*.

The cover of
FIRST SCREENING
was designed on an Apple IIe computer
using the Gutenberg Word Processing programme.

The cover drawing is entitled
4 PLANE H'S
and is for Barbara Caruso

FIRST SCREENING
is published by Underwhich Editions
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Canada M5C 2J4

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bp 

Production, publication, and copyright information for *First Screening*.

A FEW NOTES

The dozen poems to be found on this diskette (a baker's dozen if you include the cover piece) were composed over the period of a year & a half, from approximately Spring 83 to Fall 84. As a result, tho the on-screen activity never reveals it, the off-screen programming moves from brute stumbling to some much more elegant solutions, a record of how the process of programming, the process of composition, guided me to the final result. What most surprised me in this process was how concerns that had been present for me in the mid-60's, issues of composition and content i was confronting while working with my early concrete poems, suddenly found a new focus. In fact, i was finally in a position to create those filmic effects that i hadn't had the patience or skill to animate at that time.

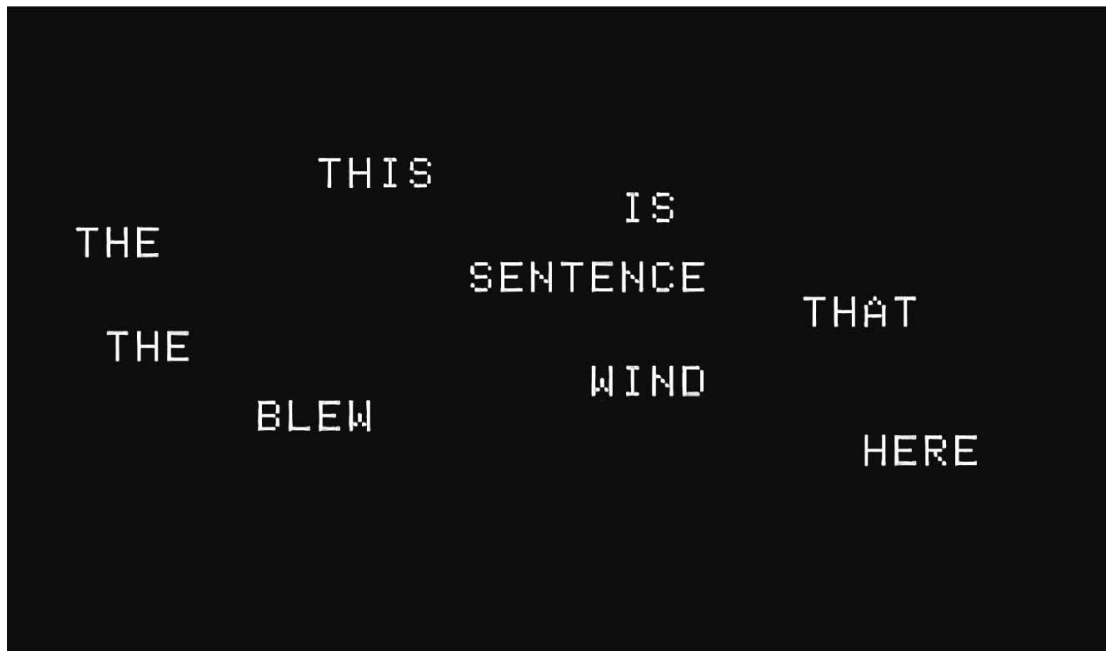
As ever, new technology opens up new formal problems, and the problems of babel raise themselves all over again in the field of computer languages and operating systems. Thus the fact that this disk is only available in an Applesoft Basic version (the only language i know at the moment) precisely because translation is involved in moving it out further. But that inherent problem doesn't take away from the fact that computers & computer languages also open up new ways of expressing old contents, of revivifying them. One is in a position to make it new.

I'm particularly grateful therefore to Stan Bevington, who got me into computers in the first place, Frank Davey and Renwick Day, who more than fanned the first flickerings of my curiosity, and Lionel Kearns and Marco Fraticelli from whom i learned many of the programming skills used to make these poems. But the dedication, which appears on this disk, is an acknowledgement to two people who kept my writing hopes up in the mid-60's when there were far fewer people out there who seemed to share the excitements and concerns these poems grow out of. In a real sense, they kept me writing.

bpNichol

Toronto, September 28th, 1984.

Introductory notes for *First Screening*.



Screenshot from the kinetic poem "After the Storm."

```
104 GOSUB 1000: REM CONSTRUCTI
    ON 1
105 GOSUB 3556: REM ANY OF YOU
    R LIP
106 GOSUB 425: REM SELF-REFLEX
    IVE 2
107 GOSUB 820: REM POEM FOR MY
    FATHER
108 GOSUB 1900: REM AFTER THE
    STORM
110 REM FOR THE CURIOUS VIEWE
    R/READER THERE'S AN 'OFF-SCR
    EEN ROMANCE' AT 1748. YOU JU
    ST HAVE TO TUNE IN THE PROGR
    AMME.
112 GOSUB 495: REM TIDAL POOL
114 GOSUB 550: REM DEDICATION
116 REM FOR FURTHER RE-MARKS
    LIST 3900,4000
118 FOR PAUSE = 1 TO 4000: NEXT
```

Code for the poems in *First Screening* with an invitation to the reader at line 110. The command "Run 1748" reveals a hidden poem called "Off-Screen Romance."

YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES

YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES (YHCHI) is the name of a fake corporation formed in 1999 by Korean artist and translator Young-Hae Chang and Seoul-based poet Mark Voge. The pair use Flash animation, an interactive program for making videos, to create powerful and often dystopian works of kinetic poetry. Many of the works of YHCHI address themes of authoritarianism, as in "BUST DOWN THE DOOR!" and "TRAVELING TO UTOPIA," both of which depict invasive searches by police officers and representatives of the state. In "BUST DOWN THE DOOR!," the pacing of the video increases quickly and becomes almost assaulting as readers/viewers are forced to experience the video as beyond their control. In "TRAVELING TO UTOPIA," policing is explicitly tied to the historical use of surveillance technologies to monitor the movements of people across borders. This work also introduces multiple plotlines: one at the top of the screen in Korean, one in the center in English, and another at the bottom of the screen, also in English. The videos of YHCHI often appear in multiple versions and multiple languages with languages left untranslated. This style of production and distribution both mimics and critiques the business models of corporations that release many versions of a product tailored to distinct sectors of the global market.

Most YHCHI digital videos begin with a countdown from ten that reproduces the opening countdowns associated with analog film reels in early cinema. They also use the Monaco font, which gives the text in their videos a distinctive, even branded, appearance. Their use of jazz music is another signature aspect of their style, and often creates syncopation across music and text. YHCHI deliberately and creatively cross old and new forms of media as they move between the literary and art worlds. They have been called pioneers of internet art and have used their work to examine and reappraise the key promises of the internet as a technology for connecting and

empowering people across the world. The following pages contain screenshots from "BUST DOWN THE DOOR!" and "TRAVELING TO UTOPIA." Please replace the search text with: We invite you to refer to the Norton Anthology ebook in the Norton Ebook Reader platform or search the web for the full videos.

BUST DOWN THE DOOR!

YOUNG-HAE
CHANG
HEAVY INDUSTRIES
PRESENTS

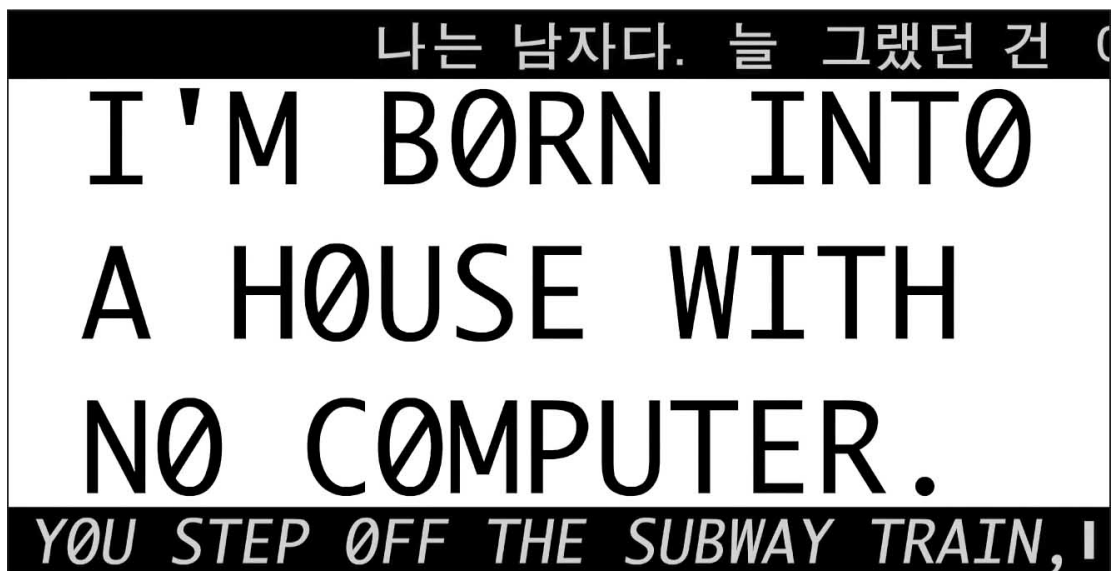
BUST DOWN
THE DOOR!

Screenshots of the poem's opening credits, which announce its author and title.

TRAVELING TO UTOPIA



Screenshot of the poem's animated title.



Screenshot of the kinetic poem's opening lines.

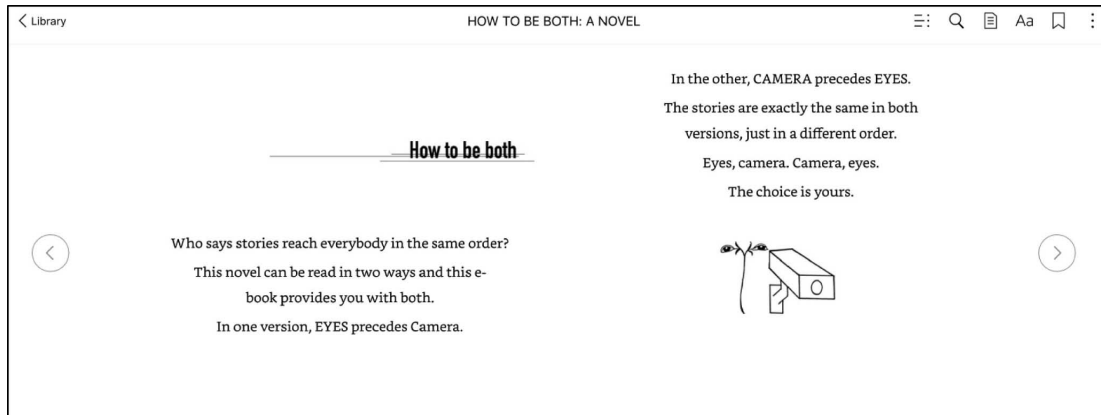
ALI SMITH

Ali Smith was born in 1962 in Inverness, the cultural capital of the Scottish Highlands. She was raised in a working-class family and grew up in a council home (public housing) near the Caledonian Canal. As a child Smith dreamed of becoming a sanitation worker and of finding all sorts of interesting thrown-away things. As a teenager she had a variety of jobs, including waitress, food preparer, and receptionist for the BBC Highlands office. Smith went on to study English language and literature at the University of Aberdeen and later pursued (but did not complete) a doctorate in Irish and American modernism at Cambridge.

While at Cambridge Smith found her passion in playwriting. Her first three plays, *Stalemate*, *The Dance*, and *Trace of Arc*, premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, a major performing arts festival. Her first short story collection, *Free Love and Other Stories*, appeared in 1995 and received the Saltire First Book of the Year Award. Since then Smith has published three more short story collections, twelve novels, including the Seasonal Quartet (pub. 2016–20), and a number of nonfiction and journalistic pieces. Smith's fiction is admired for its humorous wordplay, genderbending playfulness, and rich engagement with visual art. All of these characteristics are on display in the excerpt here from *How to Be Both* (2014), in which Smith creates a memorable female protagonist named George who is mourning the loss of her mother while also recalling their trip to Italy to view fifteenth-century frescoes. The novel was simultaneously published in two print editions, each presenting the narrative in a different order. Print readers received one of the two versions of the narrative at random, while ebook readers were given both versions from which to choose. Smith wears her erudition lightly via her characters' detailed descriptions of painted images and in their bickering over Latin phrases, etymology,

and grammar rules. In her fiction, errors become portals of discovery and narrative pathways follow more than one direction.

From How to Be Both



A screenshot from the opening of the ebook.

Consider this moral conundrum for a moment, George's mother says to George who's sitting in the front passenger seat.

Not says. Said.

George's mother is dead.

What moral conundrum? George says.

The passenger seat in the hire care is strange, being on the side the driver's seat is on at home. This must be a bit like driving is, except without the actual, you know, driving.

Okay. You're an artist, his mother says.

Am I? George says. Since when? And is that a moral conundrum?

Ha ha, her mother says. Humour me. Imagine it. You're an artist.

This conversation is happening last May, when George's mother is still alive, obviously. She's been dead since September. Now it's January, to be more precise it's just past midnight on New Year's Eve, which means it has just become the year after the year in which George's mother died.

George's father is out. It is better than him being at home, standing maudlin in the kitchen or going round the house switching things off and on. Henry is asleep. She just went in and checked on

him; he was dead to the world, though not as dead as the word dead literally means when it means, you know, dead.

This will be the first year her mother hasn't been alive since the year her mother was born. That is so obvious that it is stupid even to think it and yet so terrible that you can't not think it. Both at once.

Anyway George is spending the first minutes of the new year looking up the lyrics of an old song. Let's Twist again.¹ Lyrics by Kal Mann. The words are pretty bad. Let's twist again like we did last summer. Let's twist again like we did last year. Then there's a really bad rhyme, a rhyme that isn't, properly speaking, even a rhyme.

Do you remember when

Things were really hummin'.

Hummin' doesn't rhyme with summer, the line doesn't end in a question mark, and is it meant to mean, literally, *do you remember that time when things smelt really bad?*

Then Let's twist again, twisting time is here. Or, as all the sites say, twistin' time.

At least they've used an apostrophe, the George from before her mother died says.

I do not give a fuck about whether some site on the internet attends to grammatical correctness, the George from after says.

That before and after thing is about mourning, is what people keep saying. They keep talking about how grief has stages. There's some dispute about how many stages of grief there are. There are three, or five, or some people say seven.

It's quite like the songwriter actually couldn't be bothered to think of words. Maybe he was in one of the three, five or seven stages of mourning too. Stage nine (or twenty three or a hundred and twenty three or ad infinitum, because nothing will ever not be like this again): in this stage you will no longer be bothered with whether songwords mean anything. In fact you will hate almost all songs.

But George has to find a song to which you can do this specific dance.

It being so apparently contradictory and meaningless is no doubt a bonus. It will be precisely why the song sold so many copies and

was such a big deal at the time. People like things not to be too meaningful.

Okay, I'm imagining, George in the passenger seat last May in Italy says at exactly the same time as George at home in England the following January stares at the meaninglessness of the words of an old song. Outside the car window Italy unfurls round and over them so hot and yellow it looks like it's been sandblasted. In the back Henry snuffles lightly, his eyes closed, his mouth open. The band of the seatbelt is over his forehead because he is so small.

You're an artist, her mother says, and you're working on a project with a lot of other artists. And everybody on the project is getting the same amount, salary-wise. But *you* believe that what *you're* doing is worth more than everyone on the project, including you, is getting paid. So you write a letter to the man who's commissioned the work and you ask him to give you more money than everyone else is getting.

Am I worth more? George says. Am I better than the other artists?

Does that matter? her mother says. Is that what matters?

Is it me or is it the work that's worth more? George says.

Good. Keep going, her mother says.

Is this real? George says. Is it hypothetical?

Does that matter? her mother says.

Is this something that already has an answer in reality but you're testing me with the concept of it though you already know perfectly well what you yourself think about it? George says.

Maybe, her mother says. But I'm not interested in what I think. I'm interested in what you think.

You're not usually interested in anything I think, George says.

That's so adolescent of you, George, her mother says.

I *am* adolescent, George says.

Well, yes. That explains that, then, her mother says.

There's a tiny silence, still okay, but if she doesn't give in a bit and soon George knows that her mother, who has been prickly,

unpredictable and misery-faced for weeks now about there being trouble in the paradise otherwise known as her friendship with that woman Lisa Goliard, will get first of all distant then distinctly moody and ratty.

Is it happening now or in the past? George says.

Is the artist a woman or a man?

Do either of those things matter? her mother says.

Does either, George says. Either being singular.

Mea maxima,² her mother says.

I just don't get why you won't commit, ever, George says. And that doesn't mean what you think it means. If you say it without the culpa it just means *I'm the most*, or *I'm the greatest*, or *to me the greatest belongs*, or *my most*.

It's true, her mother says. I'm the most greatest. But the most greatest what?

Past or present? George says. Male or female? It can't be both. It must be one or the other.

Who says? Why must it? her mother says.

AUGH, George says too loud.

Don't, her mother says jerking her head towards the back. Unless you want him awake, in which case you're in charge of entertainment.

I. Can't. Answer. Your. Moral. Question. Unless. I. Know. More. Details, George says sotto voce, which, in Italian, though George doesn't speak Italian, literally means below the voice.

Does morality need details? her mother whispers back.

God, George says.

Does morality need God? her mother says.

Talking to you, George says still below the voice, is like talking to a wall.

Oh, very good, you, very good, her mother says.

How exactly is that good? George says.

Because this particular art, artist and conundrum are all about walls, her mother says. And that's where I'm driving you to.

Yeah, George says. Up the wall.

Her mother laughs a real out-loud laugh, so loud that after it they both turn to see if Henry will waken, but he doesn't. This kind of laugh from her mother is so rare right now that it is almost like normal. George is so pleased she feels herself blush with it.

And what you just said is grammatically incorrect, she says.

It is not, her mother says.

It is, George says. Grammar is a finite set of rules and you just broke one.

I don't subscribe to that belief, her mother says.

I don't think you can call language a belief, George says.

I subscribe to the belief, her mother says, that language is a living growing changing organism.

I don't think that belief will get you into heaven, George says.

Her mother laughs for real again.

No, listen, an organism, her mother says—

(and through George's head flashes the cover of the old paperback called *How To Achieve Good Orgasm* that her mother keeps in one of her bedside cupboards, from way before George was born, from the time in her mother's life when she was, she says, young and easy under some appleboughs)

—which follows its own rules and alters them as it likes and the meaning of what I said is perfectly clear therefore its grammar is perfectly acceptable, her mother says.

(*How To Achieve Good Organism.*)

Well. Grammatically inelegant then, George says.

I bet you don't even remember what it was I said in the first place, her mother says.

Where I'm driving you to, George says.

Her mother takes both hands off the wheel in mock despair.

How did I, the most maxima unpedantic of all the maxima unpedantic women in the world, end up giving birth to such a pedant? And why the hell wasn't I smart enough to drown it at birth?

Is *that* the moral conundrum? George says.

Consider it, for a moment, yes, why don't you, her mother says.

No she doesn't.

Her mother doesn't say.

Her mother said.

Because if things really did happen simultaneously it'd be like reading a book but one in which all the lines of the text have been overprinted, like each page is actually two pages but with one superimposed on the other to make it unreadable. Because it's New Year not May, and it's England not Italy, and it's pouring with rain outside and regardless of the hum (the hummin') of the rain you can still hear people's stupid New Year fireworks going off and off and off like a small war, because people are standing out in the pouring rain, rain pelting into their champagne glasses, their upturned faces watching their own (sadly) inadequate fireworks light up then go black.

* * *

Is this the place you were talking about in the car? she says. The moral conundrum?

Her mother says nothing.

She is looking.

George looks too.

The room is warm and dark. No, not dark, it's light. Both. It's like a huge dark dance hall with a lit-up picture that goes round some of its walls. There is nothing else in the room, except some low benches on which to sit and look at the walls, and over in the far corner a middle-aged lady (attendant?) on a folding seat. Apart from that, there is just the picture. It is impossible to see it all at once. Half the room is covered in it. The other half has faded picture, or no picture. What there is, though, is so full of life happening that it's actually like life, at least those bits are at the far end. And the people in the broad blue stripe which goes all round the middle of the wall, all through the middle of the picture splitting it into an above and a

below, look like they're floating, or walking on air, especially in that brighter part.

It resembles a giant comic strip. Except it's also like art.

There are ducks. There's a man with his fist round the neck of a duck. The duck looks really surprised, like it's saying *what the f—*. Above the duck's head there's another bird just sitting there completely free. It's sitting next to the man and it's watching him throttling the duck as if it's quite interested in what's happening.

This is only one detail. There are details like it everywhere. There's a paddling dog. George stares at its genitals. In fact, look at the largeness of the testicles on all the creatures who have them everywhere in the picture, except the one creature you'd expect it on, the bull. He doesn't seem to have any.

Then there's a monkey hugging the leg of a boy, who regards it with snobby disdain. Over there there's a very small child in a cap, in yellow, reading or eating something. An old woman holding a piece of paper is being attentive to the child. There are unicorns pulling a chariot here and lovers kissing there, and people with musical instruments here, people working up trees and in fields there. There are cherubs and garlands, crowds of people, women working at what looks like a loom up there, and down here there are eyes looking out of a black archway while people talk and do business and don't notice the looking. There are dogs and horses, soldiers and townspeople, birds and flowers, rivers and riverbanks, water bubbles in the rivers, swans that look like they're laughing. There's a crowd of babies. They look haughty. There are rabbits, or hares, no, both.

The buildings in the picture are sometimes beautiful and sometimes broken open, there are broken road slabs and bricks, broken arches up against fine architecture and plants growing through the whole and broken buildings everywhere.

It is impossible, though, not to keep looking then looking back again at the blue-coloured stripe which runs like a frieze round the room between the upper part and the lower parts of the picture and in which the people and animals seem to float free. The blue calls your eyes every time. It gives you a breather from the things

happening above and below it. In the blue there's a woman in a beautiful red dress just sitting in the air above a cheeky-looking goat or sheep. There's the man in the white rags. That's the man who was in the picture her mother saw at home. He's why they're here. Along from him, on the other side of the woman floating above the goat, there's a young man or a young woman, could be either, dressed in beautiful rich clothes and holding an arrow or a stick and a gold hoop thing, like everything's nothing but a charming game.

Male or female? she says to her mother who's standing under these figures.

I don't know, her mother says.

Her mother, smiling, points to the man in rags then the woman sitting on air then the playful rather dilettante richly dressed figure in turn.

Male, female, both, she says. Beautiful, all of them, including the sheep. And look at that.

She points to the top level, the level it hurts more to look at for longer because it's so high, where there are three chariots, pulled by different creatures, and a lot of people standing about, and birds and rabbits and trees and flowers and far landscapes.

In come the gods, her mother says.

Are they the gods? George says.

And nobody even notices, her mother says. Look at all the people round them. Like the gods are no big deal. In they come and nobody even bats an eyelid.

George turns on her heel to look at the other wall. Down that long side of the room there's more of the picture. It's meant to be the same kind of thing as this wall. The overall design is the same.

But it's just not as good, not as eyecatching or interesting—or maybe it hasn't been as well restored.

George has a closer look at the other picture-wall.

Its figures are just not as beautiful. There are creatures, like that giant lobster there, but they're nothing compared, say, to that horse on that wall looking out almost directly, whose eyes tell you he's not at all sure about having that man on his back. There are people and

flowers here too, even people covered in flowers, but they're less attractive, or more grotesque, than the people there on that end wall where the horses get fatter as the skies get bluer.

It is meant to be the seasons, is it?

She goes back to the good wall.

It is like everything is in layers. things happen right at the front of the pictures and at the same time they continue happening, both separately and connectedly, behind, and behind that, and again behind that, like you can see, in perspective, for miles. Then there are the separate details, like that man with the duck. They're all also happening on their own terms. The picture makes you look at both—the close-up happenings and the bigger picture. Looking at the man with the duck is like seeing how everyday and how almost comic cruelty is. The cruelty happens in among everything else happening. It is an amazing way to show how ordinary cruelty really is.

There doesn't seem to be hunting or cruelty in the top parts, just the lower parts.

The unicorns have horns that look like they're made of lit-up glass.

The clothes all the people are wearing look as if breeze is blowing through them.

George turns towards her mother and is surprised by how young and bright she looks standing under the blue.

What *is* this place? George says.

Her mother shakes her head.

Palazzo,³ she says.

Then she says a word that George can't catch.

I've never seen anything like it, her mother says. It's so warm it's almost friendly. A friendly work of art. I've never thought such a thing in my life, And look at it. It's never sentimental. It's generous, but it's sardonic too. And whenever it's sardonic, a moment later it's generous again.

She turns to George.

It's a bit like you, she says.

Then she doesn't say anything. She just looks.

The place is completely silent behind them except for the lady attendant who has been charmed by Henry into leading him from picture to picture and telling him the words for whatever he points at.

Cavallo, the woman says.

Horse, Henry says.

Si! the woman says. Bene. Unicorni. Cielo. Stelle. Terra. Dei e dee e lo zodiaco. Minerva. Venere. Apollo. Minerva Marzo Ariete. Venere Aprile Toro. Apollo Maggio Gemelli. Duca Borso di Ferrara. Dondo la giustizia. Dondo un regalo. Il palio. Un cagnolino.⁴

She sees George and her mother are both listening to her too. She points at the blank and faded walls.

Secco,⁵ she says.

She points at the still-picture-covered walls.

Fresco,⁶ she says.

She points at the really good bright end wall.

Mando o andato a Venezia per ottenere il meglio azzurro.⁷

I think she's saying that the blue colour is Venetian, her mother says.

George's mother goes over to speak to the attendant. She speaks in English. The attendant speaks back in Italian which her mother doesn't speak. They smile at each other and have a conversation.

What did she say? George asks her mother as they leave the room through the curtained door and go down the stairs.

I've no idea, her mother says. But it was nice to talk to her.

Afterwards they sit at an outside restaurant table in the garden of this place. Yellow sweet-smelling flowers drop off the trees on to their heads and on to the table. George notices a huge crack in the outside of the palace building up near the roof.

The earthquake maybe, her mother says. Quite recent. Last year. I think we're lucky to have got to see it at all. I think it's just reopened to the public.

Is that why some of the walls have pictures and some just blank plaster? George says. And two of the people in the chariots on the end wall have faces and one of them doesn't?

I don't know, her mother says. I don't know much about it. It was quite hard to find out anything. But I'm finding it quite enjoyable, not knowing.

But what about the moral conundrum? George says.

The what? her mother says.

The getting paid more for the better art, George says.

Oh, yes. That, her mother says. Well.

She tells George again about the artist who did part of the room five hundred and fifty years ago, who thought his work should be paid better than everybody else's in the room and wrote a letter asking the Duke for more money.

In fact, what happened is something even more compelling, she says. because that letter he wrote's the only reason we know anything about that artist even existing. And they only found that letter a hundred years ago. Which was more than four hundred years after he painted his bit of the walls. For four hundred years he didn't exist. No one even knew the room had frescoes in it till only about a hundred or so years ago, end of the eighteen hundreds. They'd been whitewashed over for hundreds of years. Then some whitewash fell off the walls and they found these pictures underneath. The room'd been lost till then.

So if you were in a room, I mean like if you were just sitting in a room. Could the room you were actually in get—lost? Henry says.

He looks stricken.

No, George says. Don't be an idiot.

Don't call your brother an idiot, George's mother says.

You're an idiot, Henry says.

Don't call your sister an idiot, their mother says.

I didn't call him an idiot, I said nidiot, George says. Nidiot is much worse than just idiot.

You're far and away more of a nidiot than me, Henry says.

Than I am, George says.

Her mother laughs.

You can't not do that, can you? she says. It's your nature, isn't it?

Do what? George says.

Henry runs off into the cow parsley at the rough end of the garden where there are some modern-looking sculptures and the meadow has been left to grow as high as it likes. Because the grass is so high he vanishes completely.

This is like a magic place, her mother says.

It's true that it is kind of spectacular here, George thinks—and that's the second time she's thought the word spectacular—because when they walked out here a moment ago and down the garden path to this restaurant, which looked like it might be a junk shop but turns out to serve pasta and wine, a jazz track with old-fashioned piano and trumpets suddenly started playing as if by itself in the air (in reality out of one of the restaurant's speakers) as if especially for them.

Now the garden fills with Italian schoolchildren younger than George and older than Henry. They sit round the tables and talk to each other.

Did he get the money in the end? George says.

Who? her mother says.

The painter, George says. Because he really *was* better. If he painted the part of the room at the far end.

I don't know, George, her mother says. I know almost nothing about it. I only really know what I've told you, which is what it said under the picture when I saw it at home. When we get back I'll read up about it. Though, you know, it might just be that our eyes are more used to finding some parts of the room more beautiful than the others, because of what we now expect beauty to be. It might be *our* standards rather than *theirs*. But I agree. I agree with you. Some of it is really outstandingly beautiful. Some of it is breathtaking. And I find it pretty interesting that the only reason we know that the painter who did that wall existed, even lived at all, is that he asked for more.

Like Oliver Twist,⁸ George says.

Her mother smiles.

In some ways, she says.

What was his name? George says.

Her mother screws up her eyes.

You know, I knew this, George, I did know. I read it when we were at home. But right now I can't remember it, her mother says.

We came all this way to see a picture you like that much but you can't remember the name of the man who did it? George says.

Her mother widens her eyes at her.

I know, she says. But it kind of doesn't matter, does it, that we don't know his name. We saw the pictures. What more do we need to know? It's enough just that someone painted them and then one day we came here and saw them. No?

I could look it up on your phone, George says.

Then she immediately feels a mixture of things ranging from unpleasant all the way to bad.

(Guilt and fury:

– *Sing me a love song*

– *No, my singing voice went with pregnancy*

– *I wonder where it went. I bet its [sic] in a cathedral city up in some fancy cathedral ceiling hanging out with the carvings of the angels*

Fury and guilt:

– *Howre your eyes today and how you doin what you doin where are you & whenll we meet)*

Her mother doesn't notice. Her mother has no idea. Her mother is looking down for where her phone is, checking it is safely in the pocket of her bag.

(George's own phone is not a smartphone though she will be given one of her own in less than a year's time, at Christmas, three and a half months after her mother dies.)

Let's not look anything up, her mother says. It's so nice. Not to have to know.

Her mother is going soft.

Not that there's anything wrong with soft. Her mother, soft, forgetful, vague and loving, like other people's mothers always seem to be, is a whole new prospect.

* * *

Is her mother really dead? Is it an elaborate hoax? (All hoaxes, on TV and the radio and in the papers and online, are described as elaborate whether they're elaborate or not.) Has someone elaborately, or not, spirited her mother away like on an episode of Spooks⁹ and now she's living a life elsewhere under a new name and just isn't allowed to contact people (even her own children) from her former life?

Because how can someone just vanish?

George had seen her contorted in the hospital bed. Her skin had changed colour and was covered in weals. She could hardly speak. What she did say, in the last part of whatever was happening to her and before they put George outside the door to wait in the corridor, was that she was a book, I'm an open book, she said. Though it was also equally possible that what she'd said was that she was an *unopen* book.

I a a u opn ook.

* * *

2014

Endnotes

- Note 1: 1961 song sung by Chubby Checker, following his hit single "The Twist." [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Nonsensical Latin phrase, "my maximum." The phrase "mea maxima culpa" means "my most grievous fault." [Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: An impressive building resembling a palace.[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4:

This passage seems to reflect the perspective of the listeners who do not speak Italian and are possibly mishearing it.

Translations for the Italian: "Sì": Yes! "Bene": Good. "Unicorni": Unicorns. "Cielo": Sky. "Stelle": Stars. "Terra": Earth. "Dei e dee e lo zodiaco": Gods and goddesses and the zodiac. "Minerva": Roman equivalent of Athena, goddess of wisdom and justice.

"Venere": Venus, Roman equivalent of Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. "Apollo": Roman and Greek god of prophecy and archery. "Minerva Marzo Ariete": Minerva, March (the month), and Aries, the first astrological sign of the Zodiac, where the Sun is located in the month of March. "Venere Aprile Toro": Venus, April, Taurus, second sign of the zodiac where the sun is located in the month of April. "Apollo Maggio Gemelli": Apollo, May, and Gemini, third sign of the zodiac, where the sun is located in May. "Duca Borso di Ferrara": Borso d'Este (1413–1471), Duke of Ferrara. "Dondo": Could be a misapprehension of "tondo," a Renaissance term for a circular painting. "La giustizia": justice. "Un regalo": a gift. "Il palio": The prize. "Un cagnolino": a puppy.

The location is the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, a city in Northern Italy. The "Hall of the Months" contains frescoes divided into twelve sections, one for each month, though only some still exist. The upper section of each shows the world of the gods. The middle section shows the zodiac signs. And a lower part shows the world of humans, including the court and townspeople.

[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Painting on dry plaster with water-based pigments.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Painting on wet plaster; when it dries it becomes part of the wall.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I sent or went to Venice to get the best blue.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Protagonist of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838), in which the hungry orphan Oliver says to the master, "Please, sir, I want some more."[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: British TV spy series (2002–11).[Return to reference 9](#)

DAVID MITCHELL

David Mitchell was born in 1969 in Southport, England, and received an M.A. in comparative literature from the University of Kent. As a child, he struggled with a stammer, a speech impediment that he has said informs his identity as a writer. Today, Mitchell is a novelist renowned for his ability to write in different voices and across different genres. His first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999), featured nine narrators in nine different locations telling interconnected stories. It was written while Mitchell was living in Hiroshima, Japan, where he taught English. He and his family returned to Europe in 2002 and settled in Ireland, where Mitchell now resides.


Mitchell's follow-ups to *Ghostwritten*, *Number9Dream* (2001) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004), were both shortlisted for the Booker Prize and continued his rich engagement with East Asia. They also cemented his reputation as a stylistic chameleon able to mix literary fiction with the genres of science fiction and fantasy. Mitchell has since tried his hand at the historical novel, *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010), and the horror novel, *Slade House* (2015), which grew out of the Twitter story "The Right Sort." His latest novel, *Utopia Avenue* (2020), features numerous allusions to his previous novels and deepens a self-reflexive streak in Mitchell's oeuvre as he moves toward forging a literary universe populated by related characters and connected by artful cross-references. In this excerpt from "The Right Sort," which Mitchell published on Twitter in serial form over the course of one week (July 14–20, 2014), a young boy from a middle-class background enters the aristocratic home of a lord and lady. We learn he has taken his mother's Valium to relieve his anxiety, but as the story progresses, it becomes difficult to separate the effects of the drug from the supernatural happenings within the home. The story, like the house, begins to resemble a maze in which characters and readers are caught between the world of people and the world of ghosts.

From The Right Sort¹

David Mitchell ² @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

.@SceptreBooks are delighted to present a story written by David for Twitter, serialised twice a day this week. We give you #THERIGHTSORT . . .

 20 314 170 ³

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

We get off the Number 10 bus at a pub called 'The Fox and Hounds'. 'If anyone asks,' Mum tells me, 'say we came by taxi.'

 5 95 106

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

'I thought lying was wrong,' I say. Butter wouldn't melt in my mouth. Mum gives me a look. 'It's called "creating the right impression".'

 1 39 48


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .


A lorry⁴ rumbles by. 'Besides,' adds Mum, 'If your "father" paid what the judge told him to pay, on time, we would travel more by taxi.'

 1 25 33

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Westwood Road's not a run-down road, but it's hardly posh either. Joined-up red-brick houses, like ours. Small drives. Dustbins.

 21 31


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Not like you'd expect a Lady to live in. 'Right,' says Mum, double-checking the directions she wrote on an envelope. 'This way.'



21

31

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

'So we're looking out for an alley called "Slade Alley",' says Mum. 'On the left. And mind the puddles.' Off we trudge.



1

18

30

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

It's a grey afternoon. Rain's forecast for later. Through a front window, I see wrestling on the telly.⁵ Mum walks ahead. I follow.



19

34

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

I hope to God nobody from school sees me in this tweed jacket and tie Mum bought me from Littlewoods. I look like a total ponce.⁶



1

22

44

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

If any of Gaz Townshend's lot catch me dressed like this, life won't be worth living come Monday. His gang shits on me enough as it is.



21

33

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .


It's all very well for Mum to say, 'You shouldn't care what people think': kids have laws and if you break those laws, you're dead meat.



1

36

57


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

(No point telling Mum about getting picked on: she just sighs and says, 'You should have passed the scholarship for King's,⁷ Nathan.')



19

36

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Leaves blow down from an overhanging branch. There's more leaves off than there are leaves left. October. The clocks go back tonight.⁸



22

50

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Suddenly here it is: 'SLADE ALLEY' says the old-style sign, high up on the windowless side of one of two houses the alley cuts in between.



1

21

32

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

You can't see Slade Alley till you're smack bang in front of it. Dark. Dunno.⁹ It's like Slade Alley shouldn't even be here.



20

34

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

A real live Lady, married to a real live Lord, living down here? If you ask me, Mum's ballsed it up.¹ Wouldn't be the first time.



20

33


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

'Lord and Lady Briggs's main residence is in Oxfordshire,² Mum tells me for the umpteenth time. 'This is only Lady Briggs's town house.'



20

30

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .


'I didn't say anything,' I say. 'Good,' says Mum. 'Come on then, don't dawdle.' Her voice and footsteps echo a bit.



1

18

34

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

It's colder in Slade Alley than on Westwood Road. After twenty paces, the alley turns left, then carries on between two high walls.



18

34

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

'We're to keep our eyes peeled for a door,' says Mum. 'A black iron door. Lady Briggs said it's easy to miss.' You can say that again . . .



5

29

60

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

. . . 'cause there's no door down here at all. No gate. No 'townhouse'. The alley turns right, then after twenty more paces, you're out . . .



13

23

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

. . . where a sign says 'CRANBURY ROAD'. Mum scowls at her A to Z, at her scribbled directions, at me. 'I don't understand,' she says.



9

23


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

I think I do. It's Mum's Valium.³ Makes her slapdash. She gets two prescriptions from two different doctors, and takes a double dose.



9

25


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Valium calms Mum down enough to teach her students, but it makes her mix things up. She called me Frank yesterday – Dad's name.



11

23

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Mum doesn't notice that I nick the odd pill. Valium's like my power pill, from Pac-Man.⁴ I get nervous too. I took a pill before we left.



16

27

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

The pill's just kicking in now. Valium breaks down the world into bite-sized sentences. Like this one. All lined up. Munch-munch.



1

37

69

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Valium or no Valium, when the dog barks I nearly shit myself and my lungs fill with dark and my blood fills with a scream—



3

17

32

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

But it's okay, it's okay, it's only a yappy little thing through this fence. Not a bull mastiff. Not the mastiff. The dark drains away.



11

26


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

That was three years ago. They had the dog put down. 'Destroyed', it said in the papers. Maybe Mum's noticed I've gone pale and sweaty . . .



10

23


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

. . . but probably not. She's still too flustered about not finding Lady Briggs's house. Our visit's all she's talked about all week.



10

22

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Ever since Lady Briggs invited us over to a soir  e after the rehearsal. Mum's a piano teacher. Lady Briggs plays the harp.



9

21

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

Mum made me shine my shoes, like, a gazillion times. 'Don't let me down, Nathan,' she keeps saying. 'These people are the right sort.'



12

23

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

A bald man in overalls with a broken nose walks by, turning off Cranbury Road into Slade Alley. He's carrying a ladder.



2

9

21

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

He's whistling 'I'd like to teach the world to sing'.⁵ Mum cuts in. 'Excuse me, do you know where I'll find Lady Norah Briggs's house?'



10


22

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .


(She's used her posh voice. 'House' is 'Hice'. I want to die. Being posh at my school is worse than wearing flares⁶ or being gay.

Almost.)

 1 12 31


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

The ladder man says, 'Nah, but if you find her, tell her Ladyship I fancy a bit o' posh if she fancies a bit o' rough'. He winks at me . . .

 3 11 27


David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

. . . then the ladder goes down the way we came, into Slade Alley. 'What a repulsive, greasy oik,' says Mum, quietly, thank God.

 9 21

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

What a waste of time. I could be at home, playing 'Germans versus British' on my desert battleground. Rommel's⁷ tanks are cornered.

 1 11 27

David Mitchell  @david_mitchell • Jul 14, 2014 . . .

(Me and Dad invented the game before he went back to Rhodesia.⁸ We built the landscape from papler-mâché. It's epic.)

 3 12 38

* * *

Endnotes

- Note 1: This excerpt presents tweets from the story's first day of serialized publication on Twitter. To read "The Right Sort" in

its entirety, do a web search for “David Mitchell, The Right Sort, Twitter.”[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: The checkmark icon (2009–23) referred to users, often public figures or celebrities, with “verified” status, which meant Twitter had confirmed their identities.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: On Twitter, a line of icons sits below each tweet. The word balloon icon indicates the number of user comments; the arrows icon indicates retweets, or the number of times users have re-circulated a tweet; the heart icon indicates the number of users who “liked” a tweet; and the up-arrow icon indicates the capacity to share the tweet via other websites or email.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Truck (British English).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Television (British English).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Effeminate or gay man (derogatory British slang). “Littlewoods”: English retail company.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: King’s College, a university.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Daylight saving time, when clocks are adjusted.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: “I don’t know” (slang).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Made a mistake, botched it (British English).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: County in southeast England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Prescription drug used to treat anxiety, panic attacks, or other conditions.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: 1980s arcade game where Pac-Man must avoid ghosts and eat all the pellets in the level. There are several larger pellets that allow Pac-Man to eat the ghosts.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Pop song (1971) that was the jingle for Coca-Cola before being recorded by both the The Hillside Singers and The New Seekers as a single.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Flared pants. “Posh”: elegant; upper-class (British English).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Erwin Rommel (1891–1944), German field marshal during World War II.[Return to reference 7](#)

- Note 8: Formerly a British colony; now the country of Zimbabwe. [Return to reference 8](#)

TEJU COLE

Teju Cole was born in 1975 to Nigerian parents in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and returned to Nigeria at five months old, where he grew up and lived a comfortable life in the capital city of Lagos. He briefly attended medical school at the University of Michigan before shifting his interests to art history and pursuing a doctorate in the field at Columbia University. Cole is now a writer and a photographer and serves as the Gore Vidal Professor of the Practice of Creative Writing at Harvard University. He first came to literary attention for his meditative novel *Open City* (2011), which follows a Nigerian immigrant and medical resident through New York and Belgium. He has also published the autofictional *Tremor* (2023) and several well-received essay collections and photography books, including *Known and Strange Things* (2016), *Blind Spot* (2017), and *Black Paper: Writing in a Dark Time* (2021).

Cole has made inventive use of multiple social media platforms, including Twitter, where he posted experimental literary works until 2014, such as "Seven Short Stories about Drones," printed in its entirety here, and "Hafiz," which is excerpted. On Instagram, he posts photography, and on Spotify, he curates playlists. He has also written reflectively about the role these large platforms have on the reception and distribution of the arts. When asked about his interest in internet-based writing and social media in particular, he said, "For sure, some of the smartest and most interesting literary minds of our generation and the generations to come will work in areas that are not 'books' as we currently think of them."

Seven Short Stories about Drones¹

Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

Seven short stories about drones

 10 176 75 

Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

1. Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. Pity. A signature strike leveled the florist's.

 4 234 95 


Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

2. Call me Ishmael. I was a young man of military age. I was immolated at my wedding. My parents are inconsolable.

 2 213 83 

Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

3. Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather. A bomb whistled in. Blood on the walls. Fire from heaven.

 2 206 72 

Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

4. I am an invisible man. My name is unknown. My loves are a mystery. But an unmanned aerial vehicle from a secret location has come for me.

 1 262 116 

Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

5. Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was killed by a Predator drone.



386

150



Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

6. Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His torso was found, not his head.



191

75



Teju Cole @tejucole • Jan 14, 2013 . . .

7. Mother died today. The program saves American lives.²



225

105



Endnotes

- Note 1:

Cole takes the first lines of seven classic novels and recontextualizes them. The next footnote specifies the title of each novel. When Cole tweeted these lines, he did not give away the allusions. His tweets entered into the personalized news feeds of different users and took on different contexts in each feed. To read the tweets as a sequence, a user needed to go to Cole's Twitter page. This story is not archived in a Twitter collection, but is reprinted in its entirety here.

[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: 1: *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf. 2: *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville. 3: *Ulysses*, James Joyce. 4: *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison. 5: *The Trial*, Franz Kafka. 6: *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe. 7: *The Stranger*, Albert Camus. The program refers to the global War on Terror.[Return to reference 2](#)

From Hafiz¹

George Szirtes @george_szirtes • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

Four others were there: a young man busy with a phone, a young woman, a baby in a pram, a girl who was with the woman.



28

25

²

Asa Nwa (Chi Baby) @AfricanCeleb • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

The seated man was closer to sixty than to fifty, dressed in an ordinary way, a button-down long-sleeved shirt, trousers.



26

27

Ayesha A. Siddiqi ³ @AyeshaASiddiqi • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

The young man with the phone said, "He's having chest pains. Earlier he said he was having chest pains."



26

37

Divya Sachar @culdivsac • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

"Is it a heart attack?"

"I don't know."

"Did you call 911?"



25

25

Mister Simian @MisterSimian • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

He hesitated. Then he said no, and that maybe I should. The man on the ground grimaced and did not look up.



1

23

27

Matt Pearce  @mattdpearce • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

He gave no indication of being aware of our presence. He was tranquil, wordless. The tears were falling from his eyes.



27

32

BRITTLE PAPER @brittlepaper • Jan 8, 2014 . . .

When I finished and had hung up the phone, I tried to talk to my man on the ground but his sound lacked all sound.



26

31

* * *

Endnotes

- Note 1:
Cole authored the short story “Hafiz” before sending it in tweet-length segments to twenty-one of his Twitter followers. His followers each tweeted their part of the story, which Cole then retweeted in sequence so that the complete story could appear in his Twitter feed as if being told by eyewitnesses on the street. At the same time, his tweets entered the personalized feeds of other Twitter users, which presented them in an even wider range of contexts. An excerpt from “Hafiz” is printed here; the complete story can be found by doing a web search for “Teju Cole, Hafiz.”
[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: On Twitter, a line of icons sits below each tweet. The word balloon icon indicates the number of user comments; the arrows icon indicates retweets, or the number of times users have re-circulated a tweet; the heart icon indicates the number of users who “liked” a tweet; and the up-arrow icon indicates the capacity to share the tweet via other websites or email.
[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: The checkmark icon refers to users, often public figures or celebrities, with “verified” status, meaning Twitter has confirmed their identities. Verified accounts began appearing in 2009, but Twitter paywalled the checkmark in 2023, causing some public figures to lose their icons.[Return to reference 3](#)

KAZUO ISHIGURO

b. 1954

"The big emotions loom powerfully in understatement," states Kazuo Ishiguro, and accordingly his novels are often restrained and indirect. Winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize for Literature, he is one of the most acclaimed contemporary novelists living in England, but he was born in Nagasaki, Japan, where his mother had survived the dropping of the atomic bomb. When he was five, his father's work as an oceanographer led the family to move to a small town in southern England. Ishiguro earned a B.A. in English and philosophy at the University of Kent and an M.A. in creative writing at the University of East Anglia.

Ishiguro's first two novels, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), were set largely in Japan in the aftermath of World War II, both of them cast in the monologue form that he would employ frequently in subsequent fiction. With every novel he has written since, Ishiguro has dramatically changed his work's setting, genre, or style. The location shifts to a grand English estate in his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), winner of the Booker Prize, subsequently made into a celebrated movie. It centers on the ruminations and regrets of an English butler named Stevens, so constrained by propriety, class, and duty that he has served a lord with fascist sympathies and has missed a chance for romantic fulfillment with a coworker. *The Unconsoled* (1995) marks a further departure from the crisp realism of the early novels, a

dreamlike, elliptically narrated story about a pianist in an unnamed city. *When We Were Orphans* (2000) warps and fuses detective story with historical fiction in narrating a detective's quest to understand his parents' disappearance in 1930s Shanghai. Like *The Remains of the Day*, Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is one of his best-known novels, also re-created as a film. But unlike his earlier work, it takes up and subtly remakes the genre of dystopian science fiction: English boarding school students gradually realize they are fated to play a part in a society that will use them up and brutally discard them. *The Buried Giant* (2015) is yet another leap for Ishiguro, this time into Arthurian fantasy set in medieval England. *Klara and the Sun* (2021) cultivates the innocent air of children's literature with a crucial twist: the child's perspective is narrated by a robot programmed to serve as an "Artificial Friend" to human children. Along with his novels, Ishiguro has also written short stories, film scripts, plays, and songs.

Although his novels dart in different directions, some preoccupations recur. In his early years, Ishiguro devoted himself to songwriting, and he has traced his fiction to this perhaps surprising source: "My style as a novelist comes substantially from what I learnt writing songs. The intimate, first-person quality of a singer performing to an audience, for instance, carried over for me into novels. As did the need to approach meaning subtly, sometimes by nudging it into the spaces between the lines."

Some of Ishiguro's characters grapple with regret over misdeeds and lives unlived. "On the one hand," he remarked, "there is a need for honesty, on the other hand a need to deceive themselves—to preserve a sense of dignity, some sort of self-respect. What I want to suggest is that some sort of dignity and self-respect does come from that sort of honesty." His characters sometimes are racked by conflicting demands for self-understanding and self-pacifying consolation.

Ishiguro wrote the short story "A Village after Dark" when he was preparing to write his dreamlike novel *The Unconsoled*. It frustrates our usual expectations for plot development. As in a play by Samuel

Beckett, little happens. And recalling Franz Kafka's fiction, the setting seems somewhere between dream and reality. The narrative withholds all but a few details of time and place. The narrator, Fletcher, seems a washed-up leader of some kind, but we do not learn anything about the particular ideas or the movement he once advanced. This narrative restraint places less focus on the subject of the story than on how it is told. Like many of Ishiguro's first-person narrators, Fletcher tells his own story in a way that soon raises questions about his reliability. Almost like a dream, the story seems to enact his guilt over his past: a forgotten romantic partner berates him for having ruined her life, and a fellow schoolboy accuses him of having bullied him. His accusers also partly absolve Fletcher of his misdeeds, and he tries in various ways to justify and defend himself. His regrets, self-deceptions, and vanity suggest the limits to human self-understanding. One way to approach this strange story is to consider which of its aspects lend themselves to rational and realistic understanding, and which evoke what he called the "universal language" or "grammar" of dreams. Of "memory and dream" Ishiguro has said, "you manipulate both according to your emotional needs at the time." As in much of his work, Ishiguro challenges us to rethink what we thought we knew about the conventions of fiction and about the relation between dream and reality, between memory and truth.

A Village after Dark

There was a time when I could travel England for weeks on end and remain at my sharpest—when, if anything, the travelling gave me an edge. But now that I am older I become disoriented more easily. So it was that on arriving at the village just after dark I failed to find my bearings at all. I could hardly believe I was in the same village in which not so long ago I had lived and come to exercise such influence.

There was nothing I recognized, and I found myself walking forever around twisting, badly lit streets hemmed in on both sides by the little stone cottages characteristic of the area. The streets often became so narrow I could make no progress without my bag or my elbow scraping one rough wall or another. I persevered nevertheless, stumbling around in the darkness in the hope of coming upon the village square—where I could at least orient myself—or else of encountering one of the villagers. When after a while I had done neither, a weariness came over me, and I decided my best course was just to choose a cottage at random, knock on the door, and hope it would be opened by someone who remembered me.

I stopped by a particularly rickety-looking door, whose upper beam was so low that I could see I would have to crouch right down to enter. A dim light was leaking out around the door's edges, and I could hear voices and laughter. I knocked loudly to insure that the occupants would hear me over their talk. But just then someone behind me said, "Hello."

I turned to find a young woman of around twenty, dressed in raggedy jeans and a torn jumper, standing in the darkness a little way away.

"You walked straight past me earlier," she said, "even though I called to you."

"Did I really? Well, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude."

"You're Fletcher, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said, somewhat flattered.

"Wendy thought it was you when you went by our cottage. We all got very excited. You were one of that lot, weren't you? With David Maggis and all of them."

"Yes," I said, "but Maggis was hardly the most important one. I'm surprised you pick him out like that. There were other, far more important figures." I reeled off a series of names and was interested to see the girl nodding at each one in recognition. "But this must have all been before your time," I said. "I'm surprised you know about such things."

"It was before our time, but we're all experts on your lot. We know more about all that than most of the older ones who were here then. Wendy recognized you instantly just from your photos."

"I had no idea you young people had taken such an interest in us. I'm sorry I walked past you earlier. But you see, now that I'm older, I get a little disoriented when I travel."

I could hear some boisterous talk coming from behind the door. I banged on it again, this time rather impatiently, though I was not so eager to bring the encounter with the girl to a close.

She looked at me for a moment, then said, "All of you from those days are like that. David Maggis came here a few years ago. In '93, or maybe it was '94. He was like that. A bit vague. It must get to you after a while, travelling all the time."

"So Maggis was here. How interesting. You know, he wasn't one of the really important figures. You mustn't get carried away with such an idea. Incidentally, perhaps you could tell me who lives in this cottage." I thumped the door again.

"The Petersons," the girl said. "They're an old house. They'll probably remember you."

"The Petersons," I repeated, but the name meant nothing to me.

"Why don't you come to our cottage? Wendy was really excited. So were the rest of us. It's a real chance for us, actually talking to someone from those days."

"I'd very much like to do that. But first of all I'd better get myself settled in. The Petersons, you say."

I thumped the door again, this time quite ferociously. At last it opened, throwing warmth and light out into the street. An old man was standing in the doorway. He looked at me carefully, then asked, "It's not Fletcher, is it?"

"Yes, and I've just got into the village. I've been travelling for several days."

He thought about this for a moment, then said, "Well, you'd better come in."

I found myself in a cramped, untidy room full of rough wood and broken furniture. A log burning in the fireplace was the only source of light, by which I could make out a number of hunched figures sitting around the room. The old man led me to a chair beside the fire with a grudgingness that suggested it was the very one he had just vacated. Once I sat down, I found I could not easily turn my head to see my surroundings or the others in the room. But the warmth of the fire was very welcome, and for a moment I just stared into its flames, a pleasant grogginess drifting over me. Voices came from behind me, inquiring if I was well, if I had come far, if I was hungry, and I replied as best I could, though I was aware that my answers were barely adequate. Eventually, the questions ceased, and it occurred to me that my presence was creating a heavy awkwardness, but I was so grateful for the warmth and the chance to rest that I hardly cared.

Nonetheless, when the silence behind me had gone unbroken for several minutes, I resolved to address my hosts with a little more civility, and I turned in my chair. It was then, as I did so, that I was suddenly seized by an intense sense of recognition. I had chosen the cottage quite at random, but now I could see that it was none other than the very one in which I had spent my years in this village. My gaze moved immediately to the far corner—at this moment shrouded in darkness—to the spot that had been my corner, where once my mattress had been and where I had spent many tranquil hours browsing through books or conversing with whoever happened to

drift in. On summer days, the windows, and often the door, were left open to allow a refreshing breeze to blow right through. Those were the days when the cottage was surrounded by open fields and there would come from outside the voices of my friends, lazing in the long grass, arguing over poetry or philosophy. These precious fragments of the past came back to me so powerfully that it was all I could do not to make straight for my old corner then and there.

Someone was speaking to me again, perhaps asking another question, but I hardly listened. Rising, I peered through the shadows into my corner, and could now make out a narrow bed, covered by an old curtain, occupying more or less the exact space where my mattress had been. The bed looked extremely inviting, and I found myself cutting into something the old man was saying.

"Look," I said, "I know this is a bit blunt. But, you see, I've come such a long way today. I really need to lie down, close my eyes, even if it's just for a few minutes. After that, I'm happy to talk all you like."

I could see the figures around the room shifting uneasily. Then a new voice said, rather sullenly, "Go ahead then. Have a nap. Don't mind us."

But I was already picking my way through the clutter toward my corner. The bed felt damp, and the springs creaked under my weight, but no sooner had I curled up with my back to the room than my many hours of travelling began to catch up with me. As I was drifting off, I heard the old man saying, "It's Fletcher, all right. God, he's aged."

A woman's voice said, "Should we let him go to sleep like that? He might wake in a few hours and then we'll have to stay up with him."

"Let him sleep for an hour or so," someone else said. "If he's still asleep after an hour, we'll wake him."

At this point, sheer exhaustion overtook me.

It was not a continuous or comfortable sleep. I drifted between sleep and waking, always conscious of voices behind me in the

room. At some point, I was aware of a woman saying, "I don't know how I was ever under his spell. He looks such a ragamuffin now."

In my state of near-sleep, I debated with myself whether these words applied to me or, perhaps, to David Maggis, but before long sleep engulfed me once more.

When I next awoke, the room appeared to have grown both darker and colder. Voices were continuing behind me in lowered tones, but I could make no sense of the conversation. I now felt embarrassed at having gone to sleep in the way I had, and for a few further moments remained motionless with my face to the wall. But something about me must have revealed that I was awake, for a woman's voice, breaking off from the general conversation, said, "Oh, look, look." Some whispers were exchanged, then I heard the sound of someone coming toward my corner. I felt a hand placed gently on my shoulder, and looked up to find a woman kneeling over me. I did not turn my body sufficiently to see the room, but I got the impression that it was lit by dying embers, and the woman's face was visible only in shadow.

"Now, Fletcher," she said. "It's time we had a talk. I've waited a long time for you to come back. I've thought about you often."

I strained to see her more clearly. She was somewhere in her forties, and even in the gloom I noticed a sleepy sadness in her eyes. But her face failed to stir in me even the faintest of memories.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I have no recollection of you. But please forgive me if we met some time ago. I do get very disoriented these days."

"Fletcher," she said, "when we used to know one another, I was young and beautiful. I idolized you, and everything you said seemed like an answer. Now here you are, back again. I've wanted to tell you for many years that you ruined my life."

"You're being unfair. All right, I was mistaken about a lot of things. But I never claimed to have any answers. All I said in those days was that it was our duty, all of us, to contribute to the debate. We knew so much more about the issues than the ordinary people here. If people like us procrastinated, claiming we didn't yet know

enough, then who was there to act? But I never claimed I had the answers. No, you're being unfair."

"Fletcher," she said, and her voice was oddly gentle, "you used to make love to me, more or less every time I wandered in here to your room. In this corner, we did all kinds of beautifully dirty things. It's odd to think how I could have once been so physically excited by you. And here you're just a foul-smelling bundle of rags now. But look at me—I'm still attractive. My face has got a bit lined, but when I walk in the village streets I wear dresses I've made specially to show off my figure. A lot of men want me still. But you, no woman would look at you now. A bundle of stinking rags and flesh."

"I don't remember you," I said. "And I've no time for sex these days. I've other things to worry about. More serious things. Very well, I was mistaken about a lot in those days. But I've done more than most to try and make amends. You see, even now I'm travelling. I've never stopped. I've travelled and travelled trying to undo what damage I may once have caused. That's more than can be said of some others from those days. I bet Maggis, for instance, hasn't worked nearly as hard to try and put things right."

The woman was stroking my hair.

"Look at you. I used to do this, run my fingers through your hair. Look at this filthy mess. I'm sure you're contaminated with all sorts of parasites." But she continued slowly to run her fingers through the dirty knots. I failed to feel anything erotic from this, as perhaps she wished me to do. Rather, her caresses felt maternal. Indeed, for a moment it was as though I had finally reached some cocoon of protectiveness, and I began once more to feel sleepy. But suddenly she stopped and slapped me hard on the forehead.

"Why don't you join the rest of us now? You've had your sleep. You've got a lot of explaining to do." With that she got up and left.

For the first time, I turned my body sufficiently to survey the room. I saw the woman making her way past the clutter on the floor, then sitting down in a rocking chair by the fireplace. I could see three other figures hunched around the dying fire. One I recognized to be the old man who had opened the door. The two others—sitting

together on what looked like a wooden trunk—seemed to be women of around the same age as the one who had spoken to me.

The old man noticed that I had turned, and he indicated to the others that I was watching. The four of them proceeded to sit stiffly, not speaking. From the way they did this, it was clear that they had been discussing me thoroughly while I was asleep. In fact, as I watched them I could more or less guess the whole shape their conversation had taken. I could see, for instance, that they had spent some time expressing concern for the young girl I had met outside, and about the effect I might have on her peers.

"They're all so impressionable," the old man would have said. "And I heard her inviting him to visit them."

To which, no doubt, one of the women on the trunk would have said, "But he can't do much harm now. In our time, we were all taken in because all his kind—they were young and glamorous. But these days the odd one passing through from time to time, looking all decrepit and burned out like that—if anything, it goes to demystify all that talk about the old days. In any case, people like him have changed their position so much these days. They don't know themselves what they believe."

The old man would have shaken his head. "I saw the way that young girl was looking at him. All right, he looks a pitiful mess over there just now. But once his ego's fed a little, once he has the flattery of the young people, sees how they want to hear his ideas, then there'll be no stopping him. It'll be just like before. He'll have them all working for his causes. Young girls like that, there's so little for them to believe in now. Even a stinking tramp like this could give them a purpose."

Their conversation, all the time I slept, would have gone something very much like that. But now, as I observed them from my corner, they continued to sit in guilty silence, staring at the last of their fire. After a while, I rose to my feet. Absurdly, the four of them kept their gazes averted from me. I waited a few moments to see if any of them would say anything. Finally, I said, "All right, I was asleep earlier, but I've guessed what you were saying. Well,

you'll be interested to know I'm going to do the very thing you feared. I'm going this moment to the young people's cottage. I'm going to tell them what to do with all their energy, all their dreams, their urge to achieve something of lasting good in this world. Look at you, what a pathetic bunch. Crouching in your cottage, afraid to do anything, afraid of me, of Maggis, of anyone else from those times. Afraid to do anything in the world out there, just because once we made a few mistakes. Well, those young people haven't yet sunk so low, despite all the lethargy you've been preaching at them down the years. I'll talk to them. I'll undo in half an hour all of your sorry efforts."

"You see," the old man said to the others. "I knew it would be this way. We ought to stop him, but what can we do?"

I crashed my way across the room, picked up my bag, and went out into the night.

The girl was still standing outside when I emerged. She seemed to be expecting me and with a nod began to lead the way.

The night was drizzly and dark. We twisted and turned along the narrow paths that ran between the cottages. Some of the cottages we passed looked so decayed and crumbling that I felt I could destroy one of them simply by running at it with all my weight.

The girl kept a few paces ahead, occasionally glancing back at me over her shoulder. Once she said, "Wendy's going to be so pleased. She was sure it was you when you went past earlier. By now, she'll have guessed she was right, because I've been away this long, and she'll have brought the whole crowd together. They'll all be waiting."

"Did you give David Maggis this sort of reception, too?"

"Oh, yes. We were really excited when he came."

"I'm sure he found that very gratifying. He always had an exaggerated sense of his own importance."

"Wendy says Maggis was one of the interesting ones, but that you were, well, important. She thinks you were really important."

I thought about this for a moment.

"You know," I said, "I've changed my mind on very many things. If Wendy's expecting me to say all the things I used to all those years ago, well, she's going to be in for a disappointment."

The girl did not seem to hear this, but continued to lead me purposefully through the clusters of cottages.

After a little while, I became aware of footsteps following a dozen or so paces behind us. At first, I assumed this was just some villager out walking and refrained from turning round. But then the girl halted under a street lamp and looked behind us. I was thus obliged also to stop and turn. A middle-aged man in a dark overcoat was coming toward us. As he approached, he held out his hand and shook mine, though without smiling.

"So," he said, "you're here."

I then realized I knew the man. We had not seen each other since we were ten years old. His name was Roger Button, and he had been in my class at the school I had attended for two years in Canada before my family returned to England. Roger Button and I had not been especially close, but, because he had been a timid boy, and because he, too, was from England, he had for a while followed me about. I had neither seen nor heard from him since that time. Now, as I studied his appearance under the street lamp, I saw the years had not been kind to him. He was bald, his face was pocked and lined, and there was a weary sag to his whole posture. For all that, there was no mistaking my old classmate.

"Roger," I said, "I'm just on my way to visit this young lady's friends. They've gathered together to receive me. Otherwise I'd have come and looked you up straightaway. As it was, I had it in my mind as the next thing to do, even before getting any sleep tonight. I was just thinking to myself, However late things finish at the young people's cottage, I'll go and knock on Roger's door afterward."

"Don't worry," said Roger Button as we all started to walk again. "I know how busy you are. But we ought to talk. Chew over old times. When you last saw me—at school, I mean—I suppose I was a rather feeble specimen. But, you know, that all changed when I got to fourteen, fifteen. I really toughened up. Became quite a leader

type. But you'd long since left Canada. I always wondered what would have happened if we'd come across each other at fifteen. Things would have been rather different between us, I assure you."

As he said this, memories came flooding back. In those days, Roger Button had idolized me, and in return I had bullied him incessantly. However, there had existed between us a curious understanding that my bullying him was all for his own good; that when, without warning, I suddenly punched him in the stomach on the playground, or when, passing him in the corridor, I impulsively wrenched his arm up his back until he started to cry, I was doing so in order to help him toughen up. Accordingly, the principal effect such attacks had on our relationship was to keep him in awe of me. This all came back to me as I listened to the weary-looking man walking beside me.

"Of course," Roger Button went on, perhaps guessing my train of thought, "it might well be that if you hadn't treated me the way you did I'd never have become what I did at fifteen. In any case, I've often wondered how it would have been if we'd met just a few years later. I really was something to be reckoned with by then."

We were once again walking along the narrow twisted passages between cottages. The girl was still leading the way, but she was now walking much faster. Often we would only just manage to catch a glimpse of her turning some corner ahead of us, and it struck me that we would have to keep alert if we were not to lose her.

"Today, of course," Roger Button was saying, "I've let myself go a bit. But I have to say, old fellow, you seem to be in much worse shape. Compared with you, I'm an athlete. Not to put too fine a point on it, you're just a filthy old tramp now, really, aren't you? But, you know, for a long time after you left I continued to idolize you. Would Fletcher do this? What would Fletcher think if he saw me doing that? Oh, yes. It was only when I got to fifteen or so that I looked back on it all and saw through you. Then I was very angry, of course. Even now, I still think about it sometimes. I look back and think, Well, he was just a thoroughly nasty so-and-so. He had a little more weight and muscle at that age than I did, a little more

confidence, and he took full advantage. Yes, it's very clear, looking back, what a nasty little person you were. Of course, I'm not implying you still are today. We all change. That much I'm willing to accept."

"Have you been living here long?" I asked, wishing to change the subject.

"Oh, seven years or so. Of course, they talk about you a lot around here. I sometimes tell them about our early association. 'But he won't remember me,' I always tell them. 'Why would he remember a skinny little boy he used to bully and have at his beck and call?' Anyway, the young people here, they talk about you more and more these days. Certainly, the ones who've never seen you tend to idealize you the most. I suppose you've come back to capitalize on all that. Still, I shouldn't blame you. You're entitled to try and salvage a little self-respect."

We suddenly found ourselves facing an open field, and we both halted. Glancing back, I saw that we had walked our way out of the village; the last of the cottages were some distance behind us. Just as I had feared, we had lost the young woman; in fact, I realized we had not been following her for some time.

At that moment, the moon emerged, and I saw we were standing at the edge of a vast grassy field—extending, I supposed, far beyond what I could see by the moon.

Roger Button turned to me. His face in the moonlight seemed gentle, almost affectionate.

"Still," he said, "it's time to forgive. You shouldn't keep worrying so much. As you see, certain things from the past will come back to you in the end. But then we can't be held accountable for what we did when we were very young."

"No doubt you're right," I said. Then I turned and looked around in the darkness. "But now I'm not sure where to go. You see, there were some young people waiting for me in their cottage. By now they'd have a warm fire ready for me and some hot tea. And some home-baked cakes, perhaps even a good stew. And the moment I entered, ushered in by that young lady we were following just now,

they'd all have burst into applause. There'd be smiling, adoring faces all around me. That's what's waiting for me somewhere. Except I'm not sure where I should go."

Roger Button shrugged. "Don't worry, you'll get there easily enough. Except, you know, that girl was being a little misleading if she implied you could walk to Wendy's cottage. It's much too far. You'd really need to catch a bus. Even then, it's quite a long journey. About two hours, I'd say. But don't worry, I'll show you where you can pick up your bus."

With that, he began to walk back toward the cottages. As I followed, I could sense that the hour had got very late and my companion was anxious to get some sleep. We spent several minutes walking around the cottages again, and then he brought us out into the village square. In fact, it was so small and shabby it hardly merited being called a square; it was little more than a patch of green beside a solitary street lamp. Just visible beyond the pool of light cast by the lamp were a few shops, all shut up for the night. There was complete silence and nothing was stirring. A light mist was hovering over the ground.

Roger Button stopped before we had reached the green and pointed.

"There," he said. "If you stand there, a bus will come along. As I say, it's not a short journey. About two hours. But don't worry, I'm sure your young people will wait. They've so little else to believe in these days, you see."

"It's very late," I said. "Are you sure a bus will come?"

"Oh, yes. Of course, you may have to wait. But eventually a bus will come." Then he touched me reassuringly on the shoulder. "I can see it might get a little lonely standing out here. But once the bus arrives your spirits will rise, believe me. Oh, yes. That bus is always a joy. It'll be brightly lit up, and it's always full of cheerful people, laughing and joking and pointing out the window. Once you board it, you'll feel warm and comfortable, and the other passengers will chat with you, perhaps offer you things to eat or drink. There may even

be singing—that depends on the driver. Some drivers encourage it, others don't. Well, Fletcher, it was good to see you."

We shook hands, then he turned and walked away. I watched him disappear into the darkness between two cottages.

I walked up to the green and put my bag down at the foot of the lamppost. I listened for the sound of a vehicle in the distance, but the night was utterly still. Nevertheless, I had been cheered by Roger Button's description of the bus. Moreover, I thought of the reception awaiting me at my journey's end—of the adoring faces of the young people—and felt the stirrings of optimism somewhere deep within me.

2001

HANIF KUREISHI

b. 1954

Born in Bromley, a suburb of London, to a Pakistani immigrant father and an English mother, Hanif Kureishi has much in common with the semiautobiographical protagonist of his first novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990):

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care—Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere.

The biracial and bicultural Karim is troubled by his "odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not." Like Zadie Smith and other black and Asian British writers inspired by his work, Kureishi is the product of postwar migrations, from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean, South Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, to the empire's heart. The problem of puzzling out issues of identity and race, belonging and estrangement in contemporary Britain is at the core of much of Kureishi's writing.

Kureishi studied philosophy at King's College London, receiving his B.A. in 1977. He worked at theaters in various capacities, rising from usher to writer in residence at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Trying his hand at different kinds of writing, he won international acclaim when his first screenplays were made into

movies. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), a Pakistani Briton takes over a run-down commercial laundromat and, with the help of a white friend who becomes his lover and partner, fights off racist attacks and turns the venture into a success. Kureishi's next film venture, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), is also set against the backdrop of the racial tensions of Margaret Thatcher's 1980s, featuring an open marriage between a Pakistani Briton and an Englishwoman. Pathbreaking explorations of the new multiracial Britain, these films figured prominently in discussions of race, multiculturalism, and national identity in subsequent decades. Since their release, other of Kureishi's writings have been made into films, including *London Kills Me* (1992), *The Mother* (2004), *Venus* (2006), *Weddings and Beheadings* (2007) and *Le Week-End* (2013). He has also published many essays, short stories, and novels, including *The Black Album* (1995), which explores the disenfranchisement and radicalization of young British Muslims and the book burnings of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, followed by *Intimacy* (1999), *Gabriel's Gift* (2001), *The Body* (2004), and *Something to Tell You* (2008), in which the London transit-system bombings of July 7, 2005 (killing 52 and wounding 700) touch most of the characters' lives. *The Last Word* (2014) satirizes a postcolonial novelist who turns out to be depraved. On December 26, 2022, he collapsed on a sidewalk in Rome, and realized, when he came to, that he could not move his arms or legs. Several days later, from his hospital bed in Italy, he began dictating tweets to his partner, Isabella, and his son Carlo, publishing his dispatches as threads on Twitter and as "The Kureishi Chronicles" on Substack (a subscriber-driven digital publishing platform).

Among Kureishi's works adapted into films is the short story "My Son the Fanatic," one of his many reflections on Muslim Britain long before the subject received widespread attention. In this story Parvez, who has worked for twenty years as a taxi driver in an unnamed English city, tries to ensure his son Ali's financial success as a future accountant. When his son suddenly dumps his Western movies, books, videos, clothes, and friends, Parvez is baffled. In the ensuing conflict between a partly assimilated Punjabi father, who

drinks alcohol (forbidden in Islam) and befriends a prostitute, and a son who has adopted a strictly observant form of Islam and identifies with oppressed Muslims around the world, Kureishi's story gives narrative form to the collision between different ways of belonging among Britain's people of non-Western descent.

Writing about the screenplay, Kureishi commented: "It perplexed me that young people, brought up in secular Britain, would turn to a form of belief that denied them the pleasures of the society in which they lived. Islam was a particularly firm way of saying no to all sorts of things." He surmised that decades of racial exclusion and economic disappointment help explain the appeal of fundamentalist forms of Islam to the children of South Asian immigrants in Britain:

It must not be forgotten, therefore, that the backgrounds to the lives of these young people includes colonialism—being made to feel inferior in your own country. And then, in Britain, racism; again, being made to feel inferior in your own country. . . . Yet all along it was taken for granted that 'belonging', which means, in a sense, not having to notice where you are, and more importantly, not being seen as different, would happen eventually. Where it hasn't, there is, in the children and grandchildren of the great postwar wave of immigrants, considerable anger and disillusionment. . . . The 'West' was a dream that didn't come true. But one cannot go home again. One is stuck. . . . If you feel excluded it might be tempting to exclude others.



My Son the Fanatic. A scene from the 1997 film adaptation, directed by Udayan Prasad.

Religious fundamentalists, in his view, wanted to exclude others (non-Muslims, gays, “unsubmissive women,” etc.), just as they had been excluded. Never idealizing or sentimentalizing multiracial Britain, Kureishi has been one of its most incisive observers, helping at the same time to reimagine its future.

My Son the Fanatic

Surreptitiously the father began going into his son's bedroom. He would sit there for hours, rousing himself only to seek clues. What bewildered him was that Ali was getting tidier. Instead of the usual tangle of clothes, books, cricket bats, video games, the room was becoming neat and ordered; spaces began appearing where before there had been only mess.

Initially Parvez had been pleased: his son was outgrowing his teenage attitudes. But one day, beside the dustbin, Parvez found a torn bag which contained not only old toys, but computer discs, video tapes, new books and fashionable clothes the boy had bought just a few months before. Also without explanation, Ali had parted from the English girlfriend who used to come often to the house. His old friends had stopped ringing.

For reasons he didn't himself understand, Parvez wasn't able to bring up the subject of Ali's unusual behaviour. He was aware that he had become slightly afraid of his son, who, alongside his silences, was developing a sharp tongue. One remark Parvez did make, 'You don't play your guitar any more,' elicited the mysterious but conclusive reply, 'There are more important things to be done.'

Yet Parvez felt his son's eccentricity as an injustice. He had always been aware of the pitfalls which other men's sons had fallen into in England. And so, for Ali, he had worked long hours and spent a lot of money paying for his education as an accountant. He had bought him good suits, all the books he required and a computer. And now the boy was throwing his possessions out!

The TV, video and sound system followed the guitar. Soon the room was practically bare. Even the unhappy walls bore marks where Ali's pictures had been removed.

Parvez couldn't sleep; he went more to the whisky bottle, even when he was at work. He realised it was imperative to discuss the

matter with someone sympathetic.

Parvez had been a taxi driver for twenty years. Half that time he'd worked for the same firm. Like him, most of the other drivers were Punjabis.¹ They preferred to work at night, the roads were clearer and the money better. They slept during the day, avoiding their wives. Together they led almost a boy's life in the cabbies' office, playing cards and practical jokes, exchanging lewd stories, eating together and discussing politics and their problems.

But Parvez had been unable to bring this subject up with his friends. He was too ashamed. And he was afraid, too, that they would blame him for the wrong turning his boy had taken, just as he had blamed other fathers whose sons had taken to running around with bad girls, truanting from school and joining gangs.

For years Parvez had boasted to the other men about how Ali excelled at cricket, swimming and football, and how attentive a scholar he was, getting straight 'A's in most subjects. Was it asking too much for Ali to get a good job now, marry the right girl and start a family? Once this happened, Parvez would be happy. His dreams of doing well in England would have come true. Where had he gone wrong?

But one night, sitting in the taxi office on busted chairs with his two closest friends watching a Sylvester Stallone film, he broke his silence.

'I can't understand it!' he burst out. 'Everything is going from his room. And I can't talk to him any more. We were not father and son—we were brothers! Where has he gone? Why is he torturing me!'

And Parvez put his head in his hands.

Even as he poured out his account the men shook their heads and gave one another knowing glances. From their grave looks Parvez realised they understood the situation.

'Tell me what is happening!' he demanded.

The reply was almost triumphant. They had guessed something was going wrong. Now it was clear. Ali was taking drugs and selling his possessions to pay for them. That was why his bedroom was emptying.

'What must I do, then?'

Parvez's friends instructed him to watch Ali scrupulously and then be severe with him, before the boy went mad, overdosed or murdered someone.

Parvez staggered out into the early morning air, terrified they were right. His boy—the drug-addict killer!

To his relief he found Bettina sitting in his car.

Usually the last customers of the night were local 'brasses' or prostitutes. The taxi drivers knew them well, often driving them to liaisons. At the end of the girls' shifts, the men would ferry them home, though sometimes the women would join them for a drinking session in the office. Occasionally the drivers would go with the girls. 'A ride in exchange for a ride,' it was called.

Bettina had known Parvez for three years. She lived outside the town and on the long drive home, when she sat not in the passenger seat but beside him, Parvez had talked to her about his life and hopes, just as she talked about hers. They saw each other most nights.

He could talk to her about things he'd never be able to discuss with his own wife. Bettina, in turn, always reported on her night's activities. He liked to know where she was and with whom. Once he had rescued her from a violent client, and since then they had come to care for one another.

Though Bettina had never met the boy, she heard about Ali continually. That late night, when he told Bettina that he suspected Ali was on drugs, she judged neither the boy nor his father, but became businesslike and told him what to watch for.

'It's all in the eyes,' she said. They might be bloodshot; the pupils might be dilated; he might look tired. He could be liable to sweats, or sudden mood changes. 'Okay?'

Parvez began his vigil gratefully. Now he knew what the problem might be, he felt better. And surely, he figured, things couldn't have gone too far? With Bettina's help he would soon sort it out.

He watched each mouthful the boy took. He sat beside him at every opportunity and looked into his eyes. When he could he took

the boy's hand, checking his temperature. If the boy wasn't at home Parvez was active, looking under the carpet, in his drawers, behind the empty wardrobe, sniffing, inspecting, probing. He knew what to look for: Bettina had drawn pictures of capsules, syringes, pills, powders, rocks.

Every night she waited to hear news of what he'd witnessed.

After a few days of constant observation, Parvez was able to report that although the boy had given up sports, he seemed healthy, with clear eyes. He didn't, as his father expected, flinch guiltily from his gaze. In fact the boy's mood was alert and steady in this sense: as well as being sullen, he was very watchful. He returned his father's long looks with more than a hint of criticism, of reproach even, so much so that Parvez began to feel that it was he who was in the wrong and not the boy!

'And there's nothing else physically different?' Bettina asked.

'No!' Parvez thought for a moment. 'But he is growing a beard.'

One night, after sitting with Bettina in an all-night coffee shop, Parvez came home particularly late. Reluctantly he and Bettina had abandoned their only explanation, the drug theory, for Parvez had found nothing resembling any drug in Ali's room. Besides, Ali wasn't selling his belongings. He threw them out, gave them away or donated them to charity shops.

Standing in the hall, Parvez heard his boy's alarm clock go off. Parvez hurried into his bedroom where his wife was still awake, sewing in bed. He ordered her to sit down and keep quiet, though she had neither stood up nor said a word. From this post, and with her watching him curiously, he observed his son through the crack in the door.

The boy went into the bathroom to wash. When he returned to his room Parvez sprang across the hall and set his ear at Ali's door. A muttering sound came from within. Parvez was puzzled but relieved.

Once this clue had been established, Parvez watched him at other times. The boy was praying. Without fail, when he was at home, he prayed five times a day.²

Parvez had grown up in Lahore,³ where all the boys had been taught the Koran. To stop him falling asleep when he studied, the Maulvis⁴ had attached a piece of string to the ceiling and tied it to Parvez's hair, so that if his head fell forward he would instantly awake. After this indignity Parvez had avoided all religions. Not that the other taxi drivers had more respect. In fact they made jokes about the local mullahs⁵ walking around with their caps and beards, thinking they could tell people how to live, while their eyes roved over the boys and girls in their care.

Parvez described to Bettina what he had discovered. He informed the men in the taxi office. The friends, who had been so curious before, now became oddly silent. They could hardly condemn the boy for his devotions.

Parvez decided to take a night off and go out with the boy. They could talk things over. He wanted to hear how things were going at college; he wanted to tell him stories about their family in Pakistan. More than anything he yearned to understand how Ali had discovered the 'spiritual dimension', as Bettina described it.

To Parvez's surprise, the boy refused to accompany him. He claimed he had an appointment. Parvez had to insist that no appointment could be more important than that of a son with his father.

The next day, Parvez went immediately to the street where Bettina stood in the rain wearing high heels, a short skirt and a long mac⁶ on top, which she would open hopefully at passing cars.

'Get in, get in!' he said.

They drove out across the moors and parked at the spot where on better days, with a view unimpeded for many miles by nothing but wild deer and horses, they'd lie back, with their eyes half closed, saying 'This is the life.' This time Parvez was trembling. Bettina put her arms around him.

'What's happened?'

'I've just had the worst experience of my life.'

As Bettina rubbed his head Parvez told her that the previous evening he and Ali had gone to a restaurant. As they studied the menu, the waiter, whom Parvez knew, brought him his usual whisky and water. Parvez had been so nervous he had even prepared a question. He was going to ask Ali if he was worried about his imminent exams. But first, wanting to relax, he loosened his tie, crunched a popadom⁷ and took a long drink.

Before Parvez could speak, Ali made a face.

'Don't you know it's wrong to drink alcohol?' he said.

'He spoke to me very harshly,' Parvez told Bettina. 'I was about to castigate the boy for being insolent, but managed to control myself.'

He had explained patiently to Ali that for years he had worked more than ten hours a day, that he had few enjoyments or hobbies and never went on holiday. Surely it wasn't a crime to have a drink when he wanted one?

'But it is forbidden,' the boy said.

Parvez shrugged. 'I know.'

'And so is gambling, isn't it?'

'Yes. But surely we are only human?'

Each time Parvez took a drink, the boy winced, or made a fastidious face as an accompaniment. This made Parvez drink more quickly. The waiter, wanting to please his friend, brought another glass of whisky. Parvez knew he was getting drunk, but he couldn't stop himself. Ali had a horrible look on his face, full of disgust and censure. It was as if he hated his father.

Halfway through the meal Parvez suddenly lost his temper and threw a plate on the floor. He had felt like ripping the cloth from the table, but the waiters and other customers were staring at him. Yet he wouldn't stand for his own son telling him the difference between right and wrong. He knew he wasn't a bad man. He had a conscience. There were a few things of which he was ashamed, but on the whole he had lived a decent life.

'When have I had time to be wicked?' he asked Ali.

In a low monotonous voice the boy explained that Parvez had not, in fact, lived a good life. He had broken countless rules of the Koran.

'For instance?' Parvez demanded.

Ali hadn't needed time to think. As if he had been waiting for this moment, he asked his father if he didn't relish pork pies.⁸

'Well . . .'

Parvez couldn't deny that he loved crispy bacon smothered with mushrooms and mustard and sandwiched between slices of fried bread. In fact he ate this for breakfast every morning.

Ali then reminded Parvez that he had ordered his own wife to cook pork sausages, saying to her, 'You're not in the village now, this is England. We have to fit in!'

Parvez was so annoyed and perplexed by this attack that he called for more drink.

'The problem is this,' the boy said. He leaned across the table. For the first time that night his eyes were alive. 'You are too implicated in Western civilisation.'

Parvez burped; he thought he was going to choke. 'Implicated!' he said. 'But we live here!'

'The Western materialists hate us,' Ali said. 'Papa, how can you love something which hates you?'

'What is the answer then?' Parvez said miserably. 'According to you?'

Ali addressed his father fluently, as if Parvez were a rowdy crowd that had to be quelled and convinced. The Law of Islam would rule the world; the skin of the infidel would burn off again and again; the Jews and Christians would be routed. The West was a sink of hypocrites, adulterers, homosexuals, drug-takers and prostitutes.

As Ali talked, Parvez looked out of the window as if to check that they were still in London.

'My people have taken enough. If the persecution doesn't stop there will be *jihad*.⁹ I, and millions of others, will gladly give our lives for the cause.'

'But why, why?' Parvez said.

'For us the reward will be in paradise.'

'Paradise!'

Finally, as Parvez's eyes filled with tears, the boy urged him to mend his ways.

'How is that possible?' Parvez asked.

'Pray,' Ali said. 'Pray beside me.'

Parvez called for the bill and ushered his boy out of the restaurant as soon as he was able. He couldn't take any more. Ali sounded as if he'd swallowed someone else's voice.

On the way home the boy sat in the back of the taxi, as if he were a customer.

'What has made you like this?' Parvez asked him, afraid that somehow he was to blame for all this. 'Is there a particular event which has influenced you?'

'Living in this country.'

'But I love England,' Parvez said, watching his boy in the mirror. 'They let you do almost anything here.'

'That is the problem,' he replied.

For the first time in years Parvez couldn't see straight. He knocked the side of the car against a lorry,¹ ripping off the wing mirror. They were lucky not to have been stopped by the police: Parvez would have lost his licence and therefore his job.

Getting out of the car back at the house, Parvez stumbled and fell in the mud, scraping his hands and ripping his trousers. He managed to haul himself up. The boy didn't even offer him his hand.

Parvez told Bettina he was now willing to pray, if that was what the boy wanted, if that would dislodge the pitiless look from his eyes.

'But what I object to,' he said, 'is being told by my own son that I am going to hell!'

What finished Parvez off was that the boy had said he was giving up accountancy. When Parvez had asked why, Ali had said sarcastically that it was obvious.

'Western education cultivates an anti-religious attitude.'

And, according to Ali, in the world of accountants it was usual to meet women, drink alcohol and practise usury.²

'But it's well-paid work,' Parvez argued. 'For years you've been preparing!'

Ali said he was going to begin to work in prisons, with poor Muslims who were struggling to maintain their purity in the face of corruption. Finally, at the end of the evening, as Ali was going to bed, he had asked his father why he didn't have a beard, or at least a moustache.³

'I feel as if I've lost my son,' Parvez told Bettina. 'I can't bear to be looked at as if I'm a criminal. I've decided what to do.'

'What is it?'

'I'm going to tell him to pick up his prayer mat and get out of my house. It will be the hardest thing I've ever done, but tonight I'm going to do it.'

'But you mustn't give up on him,' said Bettina. 'Many young people fall into cults and superstitious groups. It doesn't mean they'll always feel the same way.'

She said Parvez had to stick by his boy, giving him support, until he came through.

Parvez was persuaded that she was right, even though he didn't feel like giving his son more love when he had hardly been thanked for all he had already given.

Nevertheless, Parvez tried to endure his son's looks and reproaches. He attempted to make conversation about his beliefs. But if Parvez ventured any criticism, Ali always had a brusque reply. On one occasion Ali accused Parvez of 'grovelling' to the whites; in contrast, he explained, he was not 'inferior'; there was more to the world than the West, though the West always thought it was best.

'How is it you know that?' Parvez said. 'Seeing as you've never left England?'

Ali replied with a look of contempt.

One night, having ensured there was no alcohol on his breath, Parvez sat down at the kitchen table with Ali. He hoped Ali would compliment him on the beard he was growing but Ali didn't appear to notice.

The previous day Parvez had been telling Bettina that he thought people in the West sometimes felt inwardly empty and that people needed a philosophy to live by.

'Yes,' said Bettina. 'That's the answer. You must tell him what your philosophy of life is. Then he will understand that there are other beliefs.'

After some fatiguing consideration, Parvez was ready to begin. The boy watched him as if he expected nothing.

Haltingly Parvez said that people had to treat one another with respect, particularly children their parents. This did seem, for a moment, to affect the boy. Heartened, Parvez continued. In his view this life was all there was and when you died you rotted in the earth. 'Grass and flowers will grow out of me, but something of me will live on—'

'How?'

'In other people. I will continue—in you.' At this the boy appeared a little distressed. 'And your grandchildren,' Parvez added for good measure. 'But while I am here on earth I want to make the best of it. And I want you to, as well!'

'What d'you mean by "make the best of it"?' asked the boy.

'Well,' said Parvez. 'For a start . . . you should enjoy yourself. Yes. Enjoy yourself without hurting others.'

Ali said that enjoyment was a 'bottomless pit'.

'But I don't mean enjoyment like that!' said Parvez. 'I mean the beauty of living!'

'All over the world our people are oppressed,' was the boy's reply.

'I know,' Parvez replied, not entirely sure who 'our people' were, 'but still—life is for living!'

Ali said, 'Real morality has existed for hundreds of years. Around the world millions and millions of people share my beliefs. Are you

saying you are right and they are all wrong?’

Ali looked at his father with such aggressive confidence that Parvez could say no more.

One evening Bettina was sitting in Parvez’s car, after visiting a client, when they passed a boy on the street.

‘That’s my son,’ Parvez said suddenly. They were on the other side of town, in a poor district, where there were two mosques.

Parvez set his face hard.

Bettina turned to watch him. ‘Slow down then, slow down!’ she said. ‘He’s good-looking. Reminds me of you. But with a more determined face. Please, can’t we stop?’

‘What for?’

‘I’d like to talk to him.’

Parvez turned the cab round and stopped beside the boy.

‘Coming home?’ Parvez asked. ‘It’s quite a way.’

The sullen boy shrugged and got into the back seat. Bettina sat in the front. Parvez became aware of Bettina’s short skirt, gaudy rings and ice-blue eye shadow. He became conscious that the smell of her perfume, which he loved, filled the cab. He opened the window.

While Parvez drove as fast as he could, Bettina said gently to Ali, ‘Where have you been?’

‘The mosque,’ he said.

‘And how are you getting on at college? Are you working hard?’

‘Who are you to ask me these questions?’ he said, looking out of the window. Then they hit bad traffic and the car came to a standstill.

By now Bettina had inadvertently laid her hand on Parvez’s shoulder. She said, ‘Your father, who is a good man, is very worried about you. You know he loves you more than his own life.’

‘You say he loves me,’ the boy said.

‘Yes!’ said Bettina.

‘Then why is he letting a woman like you touch him like that?’

If Bettina looked at the boy in anger, he looked back at her with twice as much cold fury.

She said, 'What kind of woman am I that deserves to be spoken to like that?'

'You know,' he said. 'Now let me out.'

'Never,' Parvez replied.

'Don't worry, I'm getting out,' Bettina said.

'No, don't!' said Parvez. But even as the car moved she opened the door, threw herself out and ran away across the road. Parvez shouted after her several times, but she had gone.

Parvez took Ali back to the house, saying nothing more to him. Ali went straight to his room. Parvez was unable to read the paper, watch television or even sit down. He kept pouring himself drinks.

At last he went upstairs and paced up and down outside Ali's room. When, finally, he opened the door, Ali was praying. The boy didn't even glance his way.

Parvez kicked him over. Then he dragged the boy up by his shirt and hit him. The boy fell back. Parvez hit him again. The boy's face was bloody. Parvez was panting. He knew that the boy was unreachable, but he struck him nonetheless. The boy neither covered himself nor retaliated; there was no fear in his eyes. He only said, through his split lip: 'So who's the fanatic now?'

1997

Endnotes

- Note 1: From the Punjab, a South Asian region including part of Pakistan and northwestern India.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Prayer five times a day is one of the pillars of Islam.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Pakistani city in the Punjab region.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Muslim doctors of the law, teachers, or imams.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Muslim clerics.[Return to reference 5](#)

- Note 6: Mackintosh, a rainproof coat.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: South Asian spiced wafer of bread.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Pork is forbidden in Islam.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Religious struggle or duty, sometimes interpreted to mean religious war (Arabic).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Truck.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: To charge interest on a loan, a practice forbidden in Islam.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In some strict interpretations of Islam, a beard is seen as compulsory for men.[Return to reference 3](#)

CAROL ANN DUFFY

b. 1955

Carol Ann Duffy was born in Glasgow, Scotland, to an Irish mother and a Scottish father in a working-class Catholic family. After moving as a child to Stafford, England, she was educated there at St. Joseph's Convent and at Stafford Girls' High School, before studying philosophy at the University of Liverpool. She worked in television, edited a poetry magazine, and taught creative writing in London's schools, and since 1996 she has lectured at Manchester Metropolitan University. In 2009 she was appointed Britain's poet laureate, the first woman and first Scot to hold the post; she stepped down in 2019.

A playwright as well as poet, Duffy is especially skillful in her use of dramatic monologue, fashioning and assuming the voices of mythological, historical, and fictive characters, such as Medusa or Lazarus's imaginary wife. Such poetic ventriloquism is well suited to her feminist revisions of myth and history: it enables her to dramatize a silenced or marginalized female perspective, wittily playing on the ironic contrast between the traditional version of a narrative and her own. The biblical story of Lazarus's resurrection, for example, looks different from the perspective of his wife, who upon his miraculous return from the dead scoffs: "I breathed / his stench."

The author of love poetry ("Valentine"), historical poetry ("The Christmas Truce"), and political satire as well as dramatic

monologues, Duffy has a sharp eye for detail and uses it deftly in poems characterized by their sensuality, economy, and exuberance. Working in well-constructed stanzas, carefully pacing her rhythms, playing on half-rhymes, effectively conjuring the senses of touch, smell, and sight, she mobilizes the resources of traditional lyric and turns them to contemporary ends—the remaking of master narratives, the celebration of lesbian desire.

Warming Her Pearls

for Judith Radstone¹

Next to my own skin, her pearls. My mistress
bids me wear them, warm them, until evening
when I'll brush her hair. At six, I place them
round her cool, white throat. All day I think of her,
5 resting in the Yellow Room, contemplating silk
or taffeta, which gown tonight? She fans herself
whilst I work willingly, my slow heat entering
each pearl. Slack on my neck, her rope.

10 She's beautiful. I dream about her
in my attic bed; picture her dancing
with tall men, puzzled by my faint, persistent scent
beneath her French perfume, her milky stones.

15 I dust her shoulders with a rabbit's foot,
watch the soft blush seep through her skin
like an indolent sigh. In her looking-glass
my red lips part as though I want to speak.

20 Full moon. Her carriage brings her home. I see
her every movement in my head . . . Undressing,
taking off her jewels, her slim hand reaching
for the case, slipping naked into bed, the way
she always does . . . And I lie here awake,
knowing the pearls are cooling even now
in the room where my mistress sleeps. All night
I feel their absence and I burn.

Endnotes

- Note 1: British political activist and bookseller (1925–2001). According to Radstone's obituary in *The Guardian*, the poem was inspired by a conversation with Radstone about the practice of ladies' maids increasing the luster of their mistresses' pearls by wearing them beneath their clothes. [Return to reference 1](#)

Valentine

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
like the careful undressing of love.

5

Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
a wobbling photo of grief.

10

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.¹

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.

15

Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,
if you like.
Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

20

Endnotes

- Note 1: Telegram delivered by a young woman with a kiss.[Return to reference 1](#)

Medusa¹

A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes,
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp.

5

My bride's breath soured, stank
in the grey bags of my lungs.
I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued,
yellow fanged.
There are bullet tears in my eyes.
Are you terrified?

10

Be terrified.
It's you I love,
perfect man, Greek God, my own;
but I know you'll go, betray me, stray
from home.
So better by far for me if you were stone.

15

I glanced at a buzzing bee,
a dull grey pebble fell
to the ground.
I glanced at a singing bird,
a handful of dusty gravel
spattered down.

20

I looked at a ginger cat,
a housebrick
shattered a bowl of milk.
I looked at a snuffling pig,

25

a boulder rolled
in a heap of shit.

30 I stared in the mirror.
Love gone bad
showed me a Gorgon.
I stared at a dragon.
Fire spewed
35 from the mouth of a mountain.

And here you come
with a shield for a heart
and a sword for a tongue
and your girls, your girls.
Wasn't I beautiful?
40 Wasn't I fragrant and young?

Look at me now.

1999

Endnotes

- Note 1: In Greek mythology the mortal, snake-haired gorgon with the power to turn anyone who gazed upon her into stone. Looking at her reflection in a shield given him by Athena, Perseus cut off Medusa's head as she slept. [Return to reference 1](#)

Mrs Lazarus¹

5 I had grieved. I had wept for a night and a day
over my loss, ripped the cloth I was married in
from my breasts, howled, shrieked, clawed
at the burial stones till my hands bled, retched
his name over and over again, dead, dead.

10 Gone home. Guttled the place. Slept in a single cot,
widow, one empty glove, white femur
in the dust, half. Stuffed dark suits
into black bags, shuffled in a dead man's shoes,
noosed the double knot of a tie round my bare neck,

15 gaunt nun in the mirror, touching herself. I learnt
the Stations of Bereavement,² the icon of my face
in each bleak frame; but all those months
he was going away from me, dwindling
to the shrunk size of a snapshot, going,

20 going. Till his name was no longer a certain spell
for his face. The last hair on his head
floated out from a book. His scent went from the
house.

The will was read. See, he was vanishing
to the small zero held by the gold of my ring.

25 Then he was gone. Then he was legend, language;
my arm on the arm of the schoolteacher—the shock
of a man's strength under the sleeve of his coat—
along the hedgerows. But I was faithful
for as long as it took. Until he was memory.

So I could stand that evening in the field
in a shawl of fine air, healed, able
to watch the edge of the moon occur to the sky
and a hare thump from a hedge; then notice
30 the village men running towards me, shouting,
behind them the women and children, barking dogs,
and I knew. I knew by the sly light
on the blacksmith's face, the shrill eyes
of the barmaid, the sudden hands bearing me
35 into the hot tang of the crowd parting before me.
He lived. I saw the horror on his face.
I heard his mother's crazy song. I breathed
his stench; my bridegroom in his rotting shroud,
moist and dishevelled from the grave's slack chew,
40 croaking his cuckold name, disinherited, out of his
time.

1999

Endnotes

- Note 1: Lazarus was the man raised from the dead by Jesus (John 11). [Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Allusion to the Stations of the Cross, a series of fourteen icons (pictures or carvings) corresponding to the stages of Jesus's crucifixion and over each of which a prayer is said. [Return to reference 2](#)

The Christmas Truce¹

Christmas Eve in the trenches of France,
the guns were quiet.
The dead lay still in No Man's Land—
Freddie, Franz, Friedrich, Frank . . .
5 The moon, like a medal, hung in the clear, cold sky.

Silver frost on barbed wire, strange tinsel,
sparkled and winked.
A boy from Stroud² stared at a star
to meet his mother's eyesight there.
10 An owl swooped on a rat on the glove of a corpse.

In a copse of trees behind the lines,
a lone bird sang.
A soldier-poet noted it down—*a robin*
holding his winter ground—
15 then silence spread and touched each man like a
hand.

Somebody kissed the gold of his ring;
a few lit pipes;
most, in their greatcoats, huddled,
waiting for sleep.
20 The liquid mud had hardened at last in the freeze.

But it was Christmas Eve; *believe*; belief
thrilled the night air,
where glittering rime^o on unburied sons
treasured their stiff hair.
25 The sharp, clean, midwinter smell held memory.

On watch, a rifleman scoured the terrain—
no sign of life,
no shadows, shots from snipers,
nowt^o to note or report.
The frozen, foreign fields were acres of pain.

30

Then flickering flames from the other side
danced in his eyes,
as Christmas Trees in their dozens shone,
candlelit on the parapets,
and they started to sing, all down the German lines.

35

Men who would drown in mud, be gassed, or shot,
or vaporised
by falling shells, or live to tell,
heard for the first time then—
Stille Nacht. Heilige Nacht. Alles schläft, einsam
40 *wacht . . .* ³

Cariad,^o the song was a sudden bridge
from man to man;
a gift to the heart from home,
or childhood, some place shared . . .
When it was done, the British soldiers cheered.

45

A Scotsman started to bawl *The First Noel*
and all joined in,
till the Germans stood, seeing
across the divide,
the sprawled, mute shapes of those who had died.

50

All night, along the Western Front, they sang,
the enemies—
carols, hymns, folk songs, anthems,
in German, English, French;
each battalion choired in its grim trench.

55 So Christmas dawned, wrapped in mist,
to open itself
and offer the day like a gift
for Harry, Hugo, Hermann, Henry, Heinz . . .
60 with whistles, waves, cheers, shouts, laughs.

Frohe Weihnachten,⁴ Tommy! MerryChristmas, Fritz!
A young Berliner,
brandishing schnapps,
was the first from his ditch to climb.
65 A Shropshire⁵ lad ran at him like a rhyme.

Then it was up and over, every man,
to shake the hand
of a foe as a friend,
or slap his back like a brother would;
70 exchanging gifts of biscuits, tea, Maconochie's stew,

Tickler's jam⁶ . . . for cognac, sausages, cigars,
beer, sauerkraut;
or chase six hares, who jumped
from a cabbage-patch, or find a ball
75 and make of a battleground a football pitch.^o

I showed him a picture of my wife.
Ich zeigte ihm
ein Foto meiner Frau.
Sie sei schön, sagte er.⁷
80 *He thought her beautiful, he said.*

They buried the dead then, hacked spades
into hard earth
again and again, till a score of men
were at rest, identified, blessed.

85 *Der Herr ist mein Hirt⁸ . . . my shepherd, I shall not*
want.

And all that marvellous, festive day and night,
they came and went,
the officers, the rank and file,
their fallen comrades side by side
beneath the makeshift crosses of midwinter graves .
90 . .

. . . beneath the shivering, shy stars
and the pinned moon
and the yawn of History;
the high, bright bullets
which each man later only aimed at the sky.
95

2011

Endnotes

- Note 1: Series of unofficial but widespread ceasefires between British and German forces along the Western Front around Christmas 1914.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Town in southwest England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Original German of "Stille Nacht," or "Silent Night," which in English is sung as "Silent night. Holy night. All is calm, all is bright . . ."[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Merry Christmas (German).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: County in the West of England. See also *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), collection of poems by English poet A. E. Housman (1859–1936).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: English jam often eaten by British troops in the trenches. "Maconochie's stew": wartime food ration from Scotland.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: I showed him a picture of my wife. He thought her beautiful, he said (German).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The Lord is my shepherd (German, Psalm 23).[Return to reference 8](#)

Notes

- °: *frost*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *nothing (Northern English)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *darling (Welsh)*[Return to reference](#) °
- °: *soccer field*[Return to reference](#) °

CARYL PHILLIPS

b. 1958

"I am of, and not of, this place," repeats Caryl Phillips in a collection of essays, (2001). Born on the Caribbean island of Saint Kitts when it was still under British rule, he moved with his parents to England when he was only four months old and settled in the northern city of Leeds. Growing up Black in a predominantly White working-class community, he was the first student from his high school to attend Oxford University. After earning his B.A. in English Literature in 1979, he began making his living as a playwright, writing scripts for radio, television, and film. The success of his first novel, (1985), about a young woman who moves from the Caribbean to London with her baby and husband, enabled him to devote more energy to writing the prize-winning novels that have distinguished him as one of Britain's leading writers. The protagonist of his second novel, (1986), reverses the migration, returning to the Caribbean after twenty years in England. Since 1990, Phillips has taught predominantly in the United States, at Amherst, Barnard, and Yale.

Ever since his first novels, the voluntary and forced movement of people has remained at the empathic core of his fiction. As he remarked in an interview, his preoccupations have been "diaspora, dispossession, historical fracture, people being uprooted and displaced." Further emphasizing the mobility, displacement, and dispossession of his characters, he continued: "I am writing stories

about people who find themselves on cattle trucks, I am writing stories about people who find themselves in ships sailing to countries that they don't want to go to, I find myself writing about people who wake up in the morning and their father is gone."

Phillips is best known for his historical novels about the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath in Britain, the Caribbean, and the United States. It is central to a series of books, including the novels *Higher Ground* (1989), *Cambridge* (1991), and *Crossing the River* (1993), as well as his nonfictional *The Atlantic Sound* (2000). Reimagining the humanity of characters who are enslaved and enslaving, selling and sold, free and in bondage, Phillips deftly interweaves multiple narratives and perspectives in his novels. Sometimes he juxtaposes the radically discontinuous viewpoints of characters whose lives are entangled yet strangely parallel. The dominant narrative voices in *Cambridge* are those of Emily Cartwright, the White daughter of a British plantation owner, horrified by what she sees on the plantation but still racist in her views, and of Cambridge, the repeatedly enslaved and freed title character. Similarly, *Crossing the River* encompasses not only the story of a formerly enslaved man and his well-intentioned former enslaver but also the diary of an eighteenth-century owner of a "slave ship."

In addition to novels that probe human psychology in the historical past, some of Phillips's fictions come closer to the present and range widely in subject matter. *The Nature of Blood* (1997) is centered on the experience of a Jewish survivor of a Nazi death camp but reaches back to the fifteenth-century Venice of Othello. *A Distant Shore* (2003) features the unlikely friendship between a White English schoolteacher and an African refugee. *Dancing in the Dark* (2005) reimagines the lives of two famous minstrel singers, Bert Williams and his partner George Walker. *Foreigners* (2007), ironically subtitled *Three English Lives*, fuses real and historical material to tell the story of three Black migrants struggling and failing to make England their home. Like other of his fictions, *In the Falling Snow* (2009) explores the struggles of Caribbean migration in

Britain, but *The Lost Child* (2015) was an unexpected departure, reimagining the orphan Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Phillips continued his direct engagement with literary history in *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018), which weaves a novel around the itinerant life of Gwen Williams, the young woman who would grow up to become Jean Rhys.

Although he has also written books that combine first-person essay, travelogue, and social critique, such as *The European Tribe* (1987) and *Colour Me English* (2011), Phillips prefers in his novels to be invisible, to live through his characters. In the short autobiographical story "Growing Pains," Phillips writes about his early development as a Black child in England in a voice that is at once personal and distanced, intimate and in the third person. The story traces a writer's coming of age. It is wound around a series of encounters with stories by British, Russian, White American, African American, and other writers through which the boy-turned-young-man attempts to understand his identity and purpose. It is the story of one person's maturation, as he negotiates questions of race and class in a 1960s and '70s Britain still partly in denial about its emerging multiracialism. But in the youth's cross-cultural engagements with imaginary characters in far-flung places and times, it is also a story that showcases the expansiveness of the literary imagination.

Growing Pains

A LIFE IN TEN CHAPTERS

There are ten chapters to this story.

Chapter One

He lives in Leeds, in the North of England. His is a strange school for there is a broad white line in the middle of the playground. The boys and girls from the local housing estate have to play on one side of the line. His immigrant parents own their small house and so he is instructed to play on the other side of the line. He is the only black boy in the school. When the bell signals the end of playtime the two groups, one neatly dressed, the other group more discernibly scruffy, retreat into their separate buildings. The five-year-old boy is beginning to understand difference—in the form of *class*. The final lesson of the day is story time. The neatly dressed children sit cross-legged on the floor at the feet of their teacher, Miss Teale. She begins to read them a tale about 'Little Black Sambo'.¹ He can feel eyes upon him. He now wishes that he was on the other side of the line with the scruffy children. Either that, or would the teacher please read them a different story?

Chapter Two

He is a seven-year-old boy, and he has changed schools. At this new school there are no girls. His teacher asks him to stay behind after the lesson has finished. He is told that he must take his story and show it to the teacher in the next classroom. He isn't sure if he is being punished, but slowly he walks the short way up the corridor and shows the story to the other teacher, Miss Holmes. She sits on the edge of her desk and reads it. Then Miss Holmes looks down at him, but at first no words are exchanged. And then she speaks. 'Well done. I'll hold on to this.'

Chapter Three

The eight-year-old boy seems to spend his whole day with his head stuck in books. His mother encourages him to get into the habit of going to the local library every Saturday, but he can only take out four books at a time and by Monday he has read them all. Two brothers up the street sometimes let him borrow their Enid Blyton paperbacks. The Famous Five adventure stories.² Julian, Dick, Anne, George and Timmy the dog are the first literary lives that he intimately engages with. However, he tells his mother that he does not understand why the boys' mother warms the Enid Blyton paperbacks in the oven when he returns them. The two brothers have mentioned something to him about germs. His mother is furious. She forbids him to borrow any more books from these two boys. He begins to lose touch with Julian, Dick, Anne, George and Timmy the dog.

Chapter Four

His parents have recently divorced. He is nine and he is spending the weekend with his father, who seems to have little real interest in his son. He senses that his father is merely fulfilling a duty, but the son needs his father's attention and so he writes a story. The story includes the words 'glistening' and 'glittering' which have a glamour that the son finds alluring. When the son eventually hands the story to his father, the father seems somewhat baffled by this offering. His father is an immigrant, this much he already understands. But it is only later that he realises that imaginative writing played no part in his father's colonial education as a subject of the British Empire. His father's rudimentary schooling never embraced poetic conceits such as those his son seems determined to indulge in. As the father hands back the story to his son, a gap begins to open up between the two of them.

Chapter Five

He is only ten years old when his father decides that it is fine to leave him all alone in his spartan flat while he goes to work the night shift at the local factory. There is no television. No radio. Nothing to seize his attention beyond the few comic books and soccer magazines that the son has brought with him from his mother's house. Then, late at night, alone in the huge double bed, he leans over and discovers a paperback in the drawer of the bedside table and he begins to read the book. It is a true story about a white American man who has made himself black in order that he might experience what it is like to be a colored man. The ten-year-old boy reads John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*³ and, alone in his father's double bed, he tries hard not to be afraid. That night he leaves the lights on, and in the morning he is still awake as his exhausted father slides into bed next to him.

Chapter Six

At sixteen he has no girlfriend. The truth is, his brothers aside, he has few friends of any kind, and he seldom speaks with his father or stepmother. During the long summer holiday he locks himself away in his bedroom and he reads one large nineteenth-century novel after another. He learns how to lose himself in the world and lives of others, and in this way he does not have to think about the woeful state of his own life. At the moment he is reading *Anna Karenina*.⁴ Towards the end of one afternoon his heart leaps, and he has to catch his breath. He puts the book down and whispers to himself, 'My God.' His stepmother calls him downstairs for dinner. He sits at the table in silence but he cannot eat. He stares at his brothers, at his father, at his stepmother. Do they not understand? Anna has thrown herself in front of a train.

Chapter Seven

He is eighteen and he has completed his first term at university. He cannot go back to his father's house and so he travels 150 miles north to his mother's place. Mother and son have not, of late, spent much time in each other's company. His mother does not understand that her eighteen-year-old son is now, according to him, a man. They argue, and he gets in the car and drives off in a fit of frustration. He stops the car in the local park and opens his book. However, he cannot get past the sheer audacity of the first sentence of James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*.⁵ 'And may every nigger like this nigger end like this nigger—face down in the weeds!' This eighteen-year-old 'man' is completely overwhelmed by Baldwin's brutal prose. He reads this one sentence over and over and over again. And then he closes the book and decides that he should go back and make up with his mother.

Chapter Eight

His tutor has asked to see him in his office. Dr Rabbitt informs the student that he has passed the first part of his degree in Psychology, Neurophysiology and Statistics, but he reassures the student that at nineteen there is still time for him to reconsider his choice of a degree. Does he really wish to pursue psychology? The student patiently explains that he wishes to understand people, and that before university he was assiduously reading Jung and Freud for pleasure. His unmoved tutor takes some snuff, and then he rubs his beard. So you want to know about people, do you? He patiently explains to the student that William James was the first professor of psychology at Harvard, but it was his brother, Henry,⁶ who really knew about people. The student looks at Dr Rabbitt, but he is unsure what to say. His tutor helps him to make the decision. 'Literature. If you want to know about people study English literature, not psychology.'

Chapter Nine

He is twenty, and for the first time since arriving in England as a four-month-old baby he has left the country. He has travelled to the United States, and crossed the huge exciting nation by Greyhound bus. After three weeks on the road, he knows that soon he will have to return to England and complete his final year of university. In California he goes into a bookstore. He buys a copy of a book that has on the cover a picture of a young man who looks somewhat like himself. He takes the book to the beach, and sits on a deckchair and begins to read. When he finishes Richard Wright's *Native Son*⁷ it is almost dark, and the beach is deserted. But he now knows what he wishes to do with his life. And then, some time later, he is grateful to discover that mere ambition is fading and is being replaced by something infinitely more powerful; purpose.

Chapter Ten

He sits with his great-grandmother in the small village at the far end of St Kitts,⁸ the island on which he was born twenty-eight years earlier. He has now published two novels, and on each publication day he has asked his editor to send a copy of the book to his great-grandmother. But she has never mentioned the books and so gingerly he now asks her if she ever received them? *Does* she have them? When she moves it is like watching a statue come to life. She reaches beneath the chair and slowly pulls out two brown cardboard bundles. The books are still in their packaging. She has opened the bundles, looked at the books, and then neatly replaced them. Again she opens the packaging. She fingers the books in the same way that he has seen her finger her bible. Then she looks at her great-grandson and smiles. 'I was the teacher's favourite,' she says. She was born in 1898 and so he realises that she is talking to him about life at the dawn of the twentieth century. 'And,' she continues, 'I missed a lot of school for I had to do all the errands.' Suddenly he understands what she means. She cannot read. He swallows deeply and lowers his eyes. How could he be clumsy enough to cause her this embarrassment? She carefully puts the books back in their cardboard packaging and tucks them back under the chair. She looks at her great-grandson. She doted on this boy for the first four months of his life. The great-grandson who disappeared to England. The great-grandson who all these years later now sends her stories from England.

2005

Endnotes

- Note 1: Illustrated children's book first published in 1899, featuring a highly racialized dark-skinned protagonist, by Scottish writer Helen Bannerman (1862–1946).[Return to reference 1](#)

- Note 2: Series of children's adventure novels by English writer Enid Blyton (1897–1968).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Nonfiction book (1961) describing a six-week period in 1959 in which Griffin (1920–1980), a White man from Dallas, Texas, darkened his skin and passed as a Black man while traveling through the American South.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Novel (1878) by Russian writer Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Play (1964) by American writer James Baldwin (1924–1987).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Henry James (1843–1916), American fiction writer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Novel (1940) by American writer Richard Wright (1908–1960).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Island in the West Indies.[Return to reference 8](#)

SIMON ARMITAGE

b. 1963

Born in the village of Marsden in West Yorkshire, Simon Armitage writes poetry marked by his working-class upbringing in the rural north of England. After earning a B.A. in geography at Portsmouth University and an M.A. in social work at Manchester University, he became, like his father, a probation officer, though after six years he turned his attention from drug-rehabilitation programs to poetry. His first book of poems, *Zoom!*, was published in 1989, followed by a number of poetry collections, including *Paper Aeroplane: Selected Poems 1989–2014* (2014). His alliterative translations from Middle English of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (2007) and *The Death of King Arthur* (2012) have been widely praised. He also published a dramatic retelling of Homer's *Odyssey* (2006), and he has written novels, plays, and memoirs, including one about a walking tour in northern England and another about his obsession with popular music. Scripts for television, film, and radio have also kept him in the public eye in Britain. He has taught at a number of universities—since 2017 at the University of Leeds—and in 2015 he was elected the Oxford Professor of Poetry, a post in which his predecessors include Geoffrey Hill, Paul Muldoon, and Seamus Heaney. He was appointed Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom in 2019, succeeding Carol Ann Duffy.

Like Philip Larkin, Armitage writes lyric poems that take inspiration from the everyday rather than the exotic or the extreme.

In a manifesto poem, he writes of not having parachuted from a plane or visited the Taj Mahal; instead, he has skipped stones and “felt each stone’s inertia / spend itself against the water; then sink”; he has “held the wobbly head of a boy / at the day centre, and stroked his fat hands” (“It Ain’t What You Do, It’s What It Does to You”). A poem may be about something as simple as rolling a tire down a hill, though visionary wonder may spring from such mundane sources (“The Tyre”). His diction is pitched in a colloquial register, including slang and Northern English vernacular (for example, *ginnels* and *dunch* in “Horses, M62”). But his poetry accumulates resonances through modulations of enjambment and syntax, deft deployments of internal and end rhyme, and astonishing figurative language (an old tire is compared to “gashed, rhinoceros, sea-lion skin / nursing a gallon of rain in its gut”). Revitalizing the traditional tools of the English-language lyric, Armitage can make a poem about the encounter between cars and horses on a motorway stop in its tracks (“Standstill. / Motor oil pulses. / Black blood.”) or burst with a scattering force (“a riderless charge, // a flack of horseshoe and hoof”). Even as he seeks to engage the common reader, he is poet of uncommon formal virtuosity and versatility.

The Tyre

Just how it came to rest where it rested,
miles out, miles from the last farmhouse even,
was a fair question. Dropped by hurricane
or aeroplane perhaps for some reason,
5 put down as a cairn¹ or marker, then lost.
Tractor-size, six or seven feet across,
it was sloughed, unconscious, warm to the touch,
its gashed, rhinoceros, sea-lion skin
nursing a gallon of rain in its gut.
10 Lashed to the planet with grasses and roots,
it had to be cut. Stood up it was drunk
or slugged, wanted nothing more than to slump,
to spiral back to its circle of sleep,
dream another year in its nest of peat.
15 We bullied it over the moor, drove it,
pushed from the back or turned it from the side,
unspooling a thread in the shape and form
of its tread, in its length and in its line,
rolled its weight through broken walls, felt the shock
20 when it met with stones, guided its sleepwalk
down to meadows, fields, onto level ground.
There and then we were one connected thing,
five of us, all hands steering a tall ship
or one hand fingering a coin or ring.

25 Once on the road it picked up pace, freewheeled,
then moved up through the gears, and wouldn't give
to shoulder-charges, kicks; resisted force
until to tangle with it would have been
to test bone against engine or machine,
to be dragged in, broken, thrown out again

30 minus a limb. So we let the thing go,
leaning into the bends and corners,
balanced and centred, riding the camber,²
carried away with its own momentum.
We pictured an incident up ahead:
35 life carved open, gardens in half, parted,
a man on a motorbike taken down,
a phone-box upended, children erased,
police and an ambulance in attendance,
scuff-marks and the smell of burning rubber,
40 the tyre itself embedded in a house
or lying in the gutter, playing dead.
But down in the village the tyre was gone,
and not just gone but unseen and unheard of,
not curled like a cat in the graveyard, not
45 cornered in the playground like a reptile,
or found and kept like a giant fossil.
Not there or anywhere. No trace. Thin air.

Being more in tune with the feel of things
than science and facts, we knew that the tyre
50 had travelled too fast for its size and mass,
and broken through some barrier of speed,
outrun the act of being driven, steered,
and at that moment gone beyond itself
towards some other sphere, and disappeared.
55

1997

Endnotes

- Note 1: A mound of stones raised as a monument or marker.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Tilt built into a road at a curve, allowing vehicles to maintain speed.[Return to reference 2](#)

Horses, M62¹

Sprung from a field,
a team
of a dozen or so

5 is suddenly here and amongst,
silhouettes
in the butterscotch dusk.

One ghosts
between vans,
traverses three lanes,
10 its chess-piece head
fording the river of fumes;
one jumps the barricades

between carriageways;
a third slows
to a halt
15

then bends, nosing
the road, tonguing the surface
for salt.

Standstill.
Motor oil pulses.
20 Black blood.

Some trucker
swings down from his cab
to muster and drove;^o but

25 unbiddable, crossbred nags
 they scatter
 through ginnels^o

 of coachwork^o and chrome,
 and are distant, gone,
30 then a dunch^o

 and here alongside
 is a horse,
 the writhing mat of its hide

 pressed on the glass—
 a tank of worms—
35 a flank

 of actual horse . . .
 It bolts,
 all arse and tail

40 through a valley
 of fleet saloons.^o
 Regrouped they clatter away,

 then spooked by a horn
 double back,
45 a riderless charge,

 a flack^o of horseshoe and hoof
 into the idling cars,
 now eyeball, nostril, tooth

 under the sodium glow,
50 biblical, eastbound,
 against the flow.

Endnotes

- Note 1: Highway in northern England connecting Liverpool and Hull.[Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *herd*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *narrow passageways*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *car-body work*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *slight collision*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *station wagons*[Return to reference °](#)
- °: *burst*[Return to reference °](#)

The English Astronaut

He splashed down in rough seas off Spurn Point.¹
I watched through a coin-op telescope jammed
with a lollipop stick as a trawler fished him out
of the waves and ferried him back to Mission
Control on a trading estate near the Humber Bridge.²
5 He spoke with a mild voice: yes, it was good to be
home; he'd missed his wife, the kids, couldn't wait
for a shave and a hot bath. 'Are there any more
questions?' No, there were not.

10 I followed him in his Honda Accord to a Little
Chef on the A1³, took the table opposite, watched
him order the all-day breakfast and a pot of tea.
'You need to go outside to do that,' said the
waitress when he lit a cigarette. He read the paper,
15 started the crossword, poked at the black pudding⁴
with his fork. Then he stared through the window
for long unbroken minutes at a time, but only at the
busy road, never the sky. And his face was not the
moon. And his hands were not the hands of a man
20 who had held between finger and thumb the blue
planet, and lifted it up to his watchmaker's eye.

2010

Endnotes

- Note 1: Narrow sandbar off the northeast coast of England, near Hull.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Suspension bridge southwest of Hull. "Trading estate": industrial park.[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Longest highway in Britain, London to Edinburgh. "Little Chef": chain of British diners.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Type of blood sausage.[Return to reference 4](#)

Beck¹

It is all one chase.
Trace it back: the source
might be nothing more
than a teardrop
5 squeezed from a curlew's eye,
then follow it down
to the full-throated roar
at its mouth:
a dipper^o
10 strolls the river
dressed for dinner
in a white bib.

The unbroken thread
of the beck
15 with its nose for the sea,
all flux and flex,
soft-soaping a pebble
for thousands of years,
or here
20 after hard rain
sawing the hillside in half
with its chain.
Or here,
where water unbinds
and hangs
25 at the waterfall's face,
and just for that one
stretched white moment
becomes lace.

Endnotes

- Note 1: A mountain stream; an attention-getting gesture, such as a nod or wave. [Return to reference 1](#)

Notes

- °: *small diving bird* [Return to reference °](#)

PATIENCE AGBABI

b. 1965

Born in London to Nigerian parents, Patience Agbabi became a foster child at a young age. Later describing herself as “bi-cultural,” she grew up in a White English family in Sussex and Wales while maintaining a close relationship with her birth parents, with whom she also lived from time to time. She attributes her interest in moving across borders and boundaries to her dual family upbringing. She is drawn to moments of metamorphosis, and brings elements of linguistic transformation and translation into her poetry. Agbabi earned a B.A. in English with honors at Oxford and an M.A. in creative writing from the University of Sussex. She is the author of five collections of poetry, from her early autobiographical *R.A.W.* (1995) to *The Infinite* (2020).

Hailed as a “performance” or “spoken word” poet, Agbabi composes for both the stage and the page. In “Prologue” (also performed as “Word”), from her second collection, *Transformatrix* (2000), as in her other work, Agbabi’s language and the forms she uses amalgamate high literary art with oral and musical traditions. The poem adapts the insistent rhyme, syncopated rhythms, and self-reflexive wordplay of hip-hop. Dotted with literary terms and techniques, it also draws on the ancient *ars poetica* tradition—poems as instruction manuals for writing poetry. Partly rap boast and partly literary manifesto, Agbabi’s exuberantly hybrid art remakes and renews the disparate sources it welds together.

Agbabi's distinctive style improvises upon the history of English-language poetry. In high school she was thrilled by the General Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which she later reimagined for a contemporary, multiracial Britain as *Telling Tales* (2014). Three poems from that collection are included here, starting with "Prologue" (Grime Mix), a rewriting of the host Harry Bailey's greeting to the pilgrims. Agbabi's version plays with readers' expectations from the first line by transforming "April showers" from a weather event into a female muse for a modern day emcee. The original *Canterbury Tales* proposed a contest between pilgrims. Whoever told the best story would be rewarded with a free dinner. Agbabi embraces the spirit of performance and competition in Chaucer's poems and brings the infectious excitement of slam poetry and rap battles to her cycle of poems. "The Kiss" (The Miller's Tale) and "What Do Women Like Bes'?" (The Wife of Bath's Tale) give voice to two self-identified femme fatales: Robyn Miller and the Nigerian immigrant Alice Ebi Bafa. Robyn's dramatic monologue makes use of single-rhymed quatrains while the Wife of Bafa speaks in free verse (a rarity in Agbabi's poetry) to convey the character's no-nonsense attitude and the cadences of Nigerian English. These formal choices translate the gleeful vulgarity and tragicomedy of the original tales into modern poetic idioms.

Telling Tales returns the *Canterbury Tales* to its roots in oral storytelling and everyday language. Agbabi's long poem "The Doll's House" unfolds in rhyme royal, the rhyme scheme first developed by Chaucer for his long poems such as *Troilus and Criseyde*. Agbabi takes as her target the Harewood House in Yorkshire, a country estate built in 1738 whose wealth and grandeur mark it as one of the "Treasure Houses" of England. "The Doll's House" revisits the stately home through the prism of the transatlantic slave trade and the sugar plantations from which its owners, the Lascelles family, profited. The stanza structure of the poem turns out to be a refined façade, and the verses renovate our perspective of the opulent country home built on enslaved people's labor. "The Doll's House" offers "a beauty whittled from harsh truth." It was shortlisted for the

Forward Prize for Best Single Poem of 2014 and participates in a larger global movement toward decolonizing sites of cultural heritage.

Prologue (Word)

Give me a word
any word
let it roll across your tongue
like a dolly mixture. [o](#)
5 Open your lips
say it loud
let each syllable vibrate
like a transistor.
Say it again again again again again
10 till it's a tongue twister
till its meaning is in tatters
till its meaning equals sound
now write it down,
letter by letter
15 loop the loops
till you form a structure.
Do it again again again again again
till it's a word picture.
Does this inspire?
Is your consciousness on fire?
20 Then let me take you higher. [1](#)

Give me a noun
give me a verb
and I'm in motion
25 cos I'm on a mission
to deliver information
so let me take you to the fifth dimension.
No fee, it's free,
you only gotta pay attention.
So sit back, relax,

30 let me take you back
to when you learnt to walk, talk,
learnt coordination
and communication,
35 mama
dada.
If you rub two words together you get friction
cut them in half, you get a fraction.
If you join two words you get multiplication.
My school of mathematics
40 equals verbal acrobatics
so let's make conversation.

Give me a preposition
give me an interjection
give me inspiration.
45 In the beginning was creation
I'm not scared of revelations
cos I've done my calculations.
I've got high hopes
on the tightrope,
50 I just keep talking.
I got more skills than I got melanin
I'm fired by adrenaline
if you wanna know what rhyme it is
it's feminine.
55 Cos I'm Eve on an Apple Mac
this is a rap attack
so rich in onomatopoeia
I'll take you higher than the ozone layer.
So give me Word for Windows
60 give me 'W' times three
cos I'm on a mission
to deliver information
that is gravity defying
and I'll keep on trying

65 till you lose your fear of flying.
Give me a pronoun
give me a verb
and I'm living in syntax.
You only need two words to form a sentence.
70 I am I am I am I am I am
bicultural and sometimes clinical,
my mother fed me rhymes through the umbilical,
I was born waxing lyrical.
I was raised on Watch with Mother²
75 The Rime of the Ancient Mariner³
and Fight the Power.⁴
Now I have the perfect tutor
in my postmodern suitor,
I'm in love with my computer.
80 But let me shut down
before I touch down.

Give me a word
give me a big word
let me manifest
85 express in excess
the M I X
of my voice box.
Now I've eaten the apple
I'm more subtle than a snake is.
90 I wanna do poetic things in poetic places.
Give me poetry unplugged
so I can counter silence.
Give me my poetic licence

95 and I'll give you metaphors that top eclipses
I'll give megabytes and megamixes.

Give me a stage and I'll cut form on it

give me a page and I'll perform on it.

Give me a word
any word.

100

2000

Endnotes

- Note 1: "I Want to Take You Higher" is the title of a song (1969) by Sly and the Family Stone.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: British children's TV series (1953–73).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Long poem (1798) by the English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Song (1989) by the American hip-hop group Public Enemy.[Return to reference 4](#)

Notes

- °: *British candy*[Return to reference °](#)

Prologue (Grime Mix)

Harry 'Bells' Bailey¹

When my April showers me with kisses
I could make her my missus or my mistress
but I'm happily hitched—sorry home girls—
said my vows to the sound of the Bow Bells
5 yet her breath is as fresh as the west wind,
when I breathe her, I know we're predestined
to make music; my muse, she inspires me,
though my mind's overtaxed, April fires me,
how she pierces my heart to the fond root
10 till I bleed sweet cherry blossom en route
to our bliss trip; there's days she goes off me,
April loves me not; April loves me
with a passion, dear doctor, I'm wordsick
and I got the itch like I'm allergic
15 but it could be my shirt's on the cheap side;
serenade overnight with my peeps wide,
nothing like her, liqueur, an elixir,
overproof that she serves as my sick cure,
she's as strong as a ram, she is Aries,²
20 see my jaw-dropping jeans, she could wear these;
see my jaw dropping neat Anglo-Saxon,³
I got ink in my veins more than Caxton⁴
and it flows hand to mouth, here's a mouthfeast,
verbal feats from the streets of the South-East
25 but my April, she blooms every shire's end,
fit or vint, rich or skint,⁵ she inspires *them*
from the grime to the clean-cut iambic,⁶
rime royale,⁷ rant or rap, get your slam kick.

On this Routemaster bus,⁸ get cerebral,
30 Tabard Inn to Canterbury Cathedral,⁹
poet pilgrims competing for free picks,
Chaucer Tales, track by track, here's the remix
from below-the-belt base to the topnotch;
I won't stop all the clocks with a stopwatch
35 when the tales overrun, run offensive,
or run clean out of steam, they're authentic
cos we're keeping it real, reminisce this:
Chaucer Tales were an unfinished business.
May the best poet lose, as the saying goes.
40 May the best poet muse be mainstaying those
on the stage, on the page, on their subject:
me and April, *we're* The Rhyming Couplet.
I'm The Host for tonight, Harry Bailey,
if I'm tongue-tied, April will bail me,
45 I'm MC but the M is for mistress
when my April shows me what a kiss is . . .

2014

Endnotes

- Note 1: Innkeeper in *The Canterbury Tales* who suggests the storytelling competition that is the frame for the tales.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: The first astrological sign in the zodiac, symbolized by a ram.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Germanic people who migrated to England in the 5th century. *Anglo-Saxon* is sometimes used interchangeably with *Old English*.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: William Caxton, an important printer, publisher, and translator. He printed Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Having no money (British slang). “Vint”: to make wine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Metrical feet in poetry, consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Introduced by Chaucer, a rhyming stanza of seven lines of iambic pentameter.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: A double-decker bus used in London.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Cathedral in Canterbury, Kent, England, where the pilgrims of *The Canterbury Tales* travel to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. “Tabard Inn”: where the pilgrims gather before their journey.[Return to reference 9](#)

The Kiss

Robyn Miller¹

Get me a pint of Southwark piss!²
It all took place in a pub like this.
My tongue is black as licorice,
my tale is blue an it goes like this:

5 I'm just eighteen an newly wed.
My husband's old an crap in bed,
my lover's fit, well hung, well read,
his rival's mad, a musclehead.

10 Three loves I have an two are thick:
My husband John's a jealous prick,
the rival, Abs, thinks with his dick.
My lover's French, il s'appelle Nick,³

15 in his final year at Greenwich,
Engineering Astrophysics,
he's proposed but I'm a bitch,
I'd leave my husband, but he's rich.

20 A carpenter, an 'ancient oak'
with a heart tattoo, a real bloke's bloke,
crashed out on what he thought was coke⁴
an fifteen pints of ale. Nick's joke.

John owns the pub. We live upstairs
an every night he says his prayers,
while Nick, our lodger, flirts downstairs,
where Abs, our bouncer, sells his wares.

25 This Abs comes on to guys *and* girls.
He pushes weights an class A pills.⁵
Grey eyes, blond hair with baby curls
an a bod⁶ as hard as the drugs he sells.

30 He buys me wine, real ales an Pimms.⁷
He likes his women weasel slim
with eyebrows plucked till they're pencil thin.
His gear is class: I put up with him.

35 But Nick's more subtle, tweets an texts,
no kiss-me-quick with a pint of Becks.⁸
Belle femme, je t'aime,⁹ he says, an necks
those pills Abs recommends for sex.

40 Three men walk into a pub like this
but only one can kiss the kiss.
What is it makes my bottle fizz?
Je ne sais quoi my arse,¹ hear this:

45 What's in a kiss? I'll kiss an tell.
My husband's kiss is Southwark ale,
my lover's 'baiser'² 'fuck' in braille
an I'm his fucked-up femme fatale.³

50 So John's upstairs an proper pissed.
I'm in the bar with Nick. We've kissed
in English, French an every lisped
linguistic twist, you get the gist.

 High on the pills that kick like tabs,⁴
we crawl around the floor like crabs,
Adam, Eve,⁵ on hormone jabs,
we got The Knowledge like black cabs.

55 Nous faisons l'amour⁶ all night,
 an by six o'clock it's still not light
 when Abs knocks on the window, tight,
 Kiss me, babes. I say, Alright.

60 Window's open, total geared
 he's tongueing me but something's weird:
 too right, cos I ain't got no beard,
 stead of my lips, he got my rear!

Fuck you! Storms off down the alleyway.
 Then tap, tap, tap on the central bay,
 Mr Am-I-straight-or-gay?
 back for his petit déjeuner!⁷

65 *À moi!*⁸ Nick winks, bares his behind
 for Abs's probing lips to find:
 then farts a fart, the deadly kind,
 a blast that almost makes Abs blind!

70 We laugh, but Abs laughs last, the sod,⁹
 Abs has a hard-on, like his bod,
 he grabs Nick's arse, I swear to God,
 in goes his red-hot iron rod!

75 *Bordel de merde!*¹ Well sick, that kiss
 cos Abs is built like an obelisk.
 John wakes, falls headlong, slips a disc,
 slurs, *What in great God's name is this?*

80 My husband's so in shock to see
 the men, he sobers instantly
 an doesn't even notice me
 until I'm dressed. So I'm Scot-free
 but Abs an Nick, he throws them out.

It's made him even more devout.
Now, when I see them, *Kiss?* I shout,
raise my eyebrows high, an pout.

85 So, I got fucked; John's a fuckwit;
an Nick my lover, fucked to shit;
an Abs scored hard, he's fucking fit;
both men were fucked by the fucked-off git.²

90 If you drink your beer in a tulip glass³
an kiss the air cos you think you're class
but draw the line at this French farce,
bon appétit⁴—French-kiss my arse!

2014

Endnotes

- Note 1: In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Miller is named Robyn and is the narrator of a bawdy tale meant to respond to the gentility of "The Knight's Tale."[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Alcoholic beverage (slang). "Southwark": area of London on the southern bank of the river Thames.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: His name is (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Cocaine (slang).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Class of drugs including amphetamines and cocaine.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Body (slang).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: English brand of gin-based liqueur.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: German brand of beer.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Beautiful woman, I love you (French).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Something that can't be described; literally "I don't know what" (French).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Kiss (French).[Return to reference 2](#)

- Note 3: Trope of a seductive woman leading her lover into a trap; literally “fatal woman” (French).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A portion of a drug, like ecstasy or LSD (slang).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: In the Bible, the first man and woman created by God.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: We make love (French).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Breakfast (French).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: My turn (French).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: An unpleasant man (British slang), formerly slang for a homosexual male.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: For fuck’s sake (French).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A foolish person (slang).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Kind of beer glass.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Enjoy your meal (French).[Return to reference 4](#)

What Do Women Like Bes'? (The Wife of Bath's Tale)¹

Mrs Alice Ebi Bafa

My name is Mrs Alice Ebi Bafa,
I come from Nigeria.
I'm very fine, isn't it?
My nex' birthday I'll be . . . twenty-nine.
I'm business woman.
5 Would you like to buy some cloth?
I've all de latest styles from Lagos,²
Italian shoe an' handbag to match,
lace, linen an' Dutch wax.³
I only buy de bes'
10 an' I travel first class.
Some say I have blood on my han's
'cause I like to paint my nails red
but others call me femme fatale.⁴
My father had four wives
15 so I've had five husband.
I cast a spell with my gap-tooth smile
an' my bottom power!
Three were good and two were bad.
The first three were old and rich
20 an' I was young and fit.
They died of exhaustion!
The first from Ghana, second Sierra Leone,⁵
the third was white Englishman.
Short or tall, black or white,
25 I had race relations with dem.
They were quiet simple men
so I told lie to pepper de marriage.
Why you drink Guinness⁶ in my neighbour's house-o?
Is she so fine in her Jimmy Shoe?⁷

30 *You go vex if I meet Justice Bafa*
in Lagos bar and off my phone! Ah-ah!
*Am I Delilah to cut off your head?*⁸
I accused them of fornication
when they could barely stand on their two legs.
35 To enter my good book, they go beg!
 The fourth one was ladies' man,
I could not count his women on one han'
but he'd rage if I looked at another man.
40 He puff his ches' like King Solomon⁹
with wife and concubine
but woman must be faithful and sober.
Such talk is not worth one kobo!¹
I am not a feminax,²
I do not believe women are equal to men,
45 women are better!
Our chamber of Venus³
is for both birth and pleasure.
I was very wild when I was young.
They called me Miss Highlife,
50 I was not considered a good wife
but I always respected my husban'.
He died when I returned from dis London.
 The fifth one I married for love.
Chief Justice 'Aboniki' Bafa.
55 He was studying law at University of Ibadon.⁴
He was not yet twenty-one,
wicked in bed and so handsome
but he liked pornographic magazine.
His favourite was *Playboy*.⁵
60 One day I threw it on fire
to teach him a lesson.
He turned into wife batterer.
He was to regret his action.
I beat him till he begged for his ancestors!

Now we get on like house on fire.
65 Some say I'm a witchcraft
 'cause I did not bear dem children.
 They do not understand the Western medicine.
 Since my first husban', from Ghana,
70 I had freedom of procreation.
 He wanted ten children to pass my hip
 but I learnt how to wield de whip.
 Ghana is very advanced,
 the female owns the children not de male.
75 This is their folktale
 I tell in my own tongue:
 'What Do Women Most Desire?'
 A big man soldier
 resided in king's household.
80 But outside de compound
 he saw small girl, fourteen years of age
 and took her by force!
 He was disgraced and sentenced to death!
 They must cut off his . . . head.
85 In Ghana, woman was goddess.
 But the queen pitied his sorrow,
 she would spare his life
 if he could answer question
 What thing is it that women most desire?
90 in a year and tomorrow.
 The soldier went on his two legs.
 What do women like bes'?
 Some said gold coin, or fine cloth,
 some said man be chilli-pepper hot,
95 some said freedom, some said marriage,
 some said we want husband think
 we can keep secret to chest.
 None were correct
 and he failed the brain to guess.
 The year end he mus' return.

100 Off road he heard beating of drum
an' saw plenty women, fit and young,
dancing in kente cloth,⁶
traditional dress of Ghana.

105 They must give him answer.
But they disappeared into hot air.
Only an old old madame
suffering from eyes, leg rough like yam.
Greetings, Nana! I beg you your wisdom.
110 *What is the greatest desire of women?*
She smiled, *I reveal secret!*
But sozaboy,⁷ promise
to grant my bes' wish.
He gives her his word.

105 The old madame is elated.
Nex' day old and young congregated
to hear soldier response.
Even mosquito quiet for his reply:
110 *Women desire to have sovereignty*
over their husbands, or lovers.
They want to have mastery over him.
If I lie, I forfeit my head for sin.
The palace sings jubilation.
No woman can contradict him,
115 wife, widow or virgin.
But the old madame with eyes
must have her wish:
That he must take her hand in marriage!
He think say it worse than death
120 but soldier mus' honour his debt.
That night old madame be smiling in bed.
It pain him to look his newlywed.
Husban', pay your dues to wife!
Am I too poor for love?
125 *I can amen' myself, Sir,*

but you must amen' yourself also.
Your family not give virtue, dat from God.
Your pride not worth one cedi!
You say I old. Respect your elder!
130 And if I ugly, I not take lover.
Ugliness an' age keep me chaste.
Still he refuse to look her face.
I make amen', my husban'. Choose!
I remain ugly an' old
135 an' faithful to your body,
What a dilemma!
He frown till he resemble old papa.
My wife, he says, Choose for your husband.
140 I place myself in your capable hands.
This so pleases the old old madame.
Kiss me, my husban', so handsome!
You have given me power you should.
I shall be both beautiful an' good.
145 Look my face when cock crow,
I am very pleasing to you.
Her prophecy came to pass
and the marriage consummated in bliss . . .
So she married a rapist
150 but he learnt his lesson.
May God give us young submissive husband!
You like my headtie?
It's de latest fashion.
They sell like hot cake on Victoria Island.⁸
155 Fifty pounds.
I give you discount 'cause I like your smile.
The quality is very good.
If I take off more I will not make profit
an' I travel to Lagos nex' week.
160 Make it my lucky day.
Please, I beg you!

Endnotes

- Note 1: Female narrator who has been married five times in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*; she gives rare insight into how women should navigate the institution of marriage.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Largest city in Nigeria.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: A type of cotton fabric common in African textiles.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Trope of a seductive woman leading her lover into a trap; literally "fatal woman" (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Countries in West Africa.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Irish brand of beer.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Reference to Jimmy Choo, a luxury brand of shoes.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: In the Hebrew Bible, the lover of Samson who is bribed to find the source of his strength. When she learns it is his hair, she orders a servant to cut Samson's hair. Delilah is associated with treacherous women.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: In the Old Testament and Hebrew Bible, a king of Israel.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Denomination of Nigerian currency.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Possible pun on "feminist" and Feminax, a pill to relieve menstrual pain.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: In Roman mythology, the goddess of love, beauty, and sexuality.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Oldest university in Nigeria.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Magazine known for nude and semi-nude photos of women.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Ghanaian fabric hand woven from lengths of colorful cotton and silk.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Pronunciation spelling of *soldier boy*.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Affluent area of Lagos, Nigeria.[Return to reference 8](#)

The Doll's House

The source of the wealth that built Harewood¹ is historical fact. There is nothing anyone can do to change the past, however appalling or regrettable that past might be. What we can do, however, what we must do, is engage with that legacy and in so doing stand a chance of having a positive effect on the future.—David Lascelles²

Art is a lie that makes us realise truth.—Pablo Picasso³

5 Welcome to my house, this stately home
 where, below stairs, my father rules as chef:
 confecting, out of sugar-flesh and -bone,
 decor so fine, your tongue will treble clef
 singing its name. Near-sighted and tone-deaf,
 I smell-taste-touch; create each replica
 in my mind's tongue. My name? Angelica.

10 This is my world, the world of haute cuisine:
 high frosted ceilings, modelled on high art,
 reflected in each carpet's rich design;
 each bed, each armchair listed a la carte.
 Come, fellow connoisseur of taste, let's start
 below stairs, where you'll blacken your sweet tooth,
 sucking a beauty whittled from harsh truth . . .

15 Mind your step! The stairway's worn and steep,
 let your sixth senses merge in the half-light . . .
 This muted corridor leads to the deep
 recesses of the house. Here, to your right,
 my father's realm of uncurbed appetite—
 private! The whiff of strangers breaks his spell.

20 Now left, to the dead end. Stop! Can you smell
cinnamon, brown heat in the afternoon
of someone else's summer? This rust key
unlocks the passage to my tiny room,
25 stick-cabin, sound-proofed with a symphony
of cinnamon; shrine to olfactory
where I withdraw to paint in cordon bleu,⁴
shape, recreate this house; in miniature

All art is imitation: I'm a sculptor
of past-imperfect; hungry, I extract
30 molasses; de- and reconstruct high culture
from base material; blend art and fact
in every glazed and glistening artefact
housed in this doll's house. Stately home of sugar.
Of Demerara⁵ cubes secured with nougat.

Look at its hall bedecked with royal icing—
the ceiling's crossbones mirrored in the frieze,
the chimneypiece. The floor is sugar glazing
clear as a frozen lake. My centrepiece
statue of Eve, what a creative feast!
40 A crisp Pink Lady,⁶ sculpted with my teeth,
its toffee glaze filming the flesh beneath.

The music room's my favourite. I make music
by echoing design: the violet-rose
piped ceiling is the carpet's fine mosaic
45 of granulated violet and rose,
aimed to delight the eye, the tongue, the nose.
Even the tiny chairs are steeped in flavour
delicate as a demisemiquaver.⁷

50 Taste, if you like, sweet as a mothertongue . . .
See how this bedroom echoes my refrain:

the chairs, the secretaire, commode, chaise longue,
four-poster bed, all carved from sugarcane;
even the curtains that adorn its frame,
55 chiselled from the bark, each lavish fold
drizzled with tiny threads of spun 'white gold'.

The library was hardest. How to forge
each candied volume wafer-thin, each word
burnt sugar. In the midnight hours, I'd gorge
60 on bubbling syrup, mouth its language; learned
the temperature at which burnt sugar burned,
turned sweet to bitter; inked a tiny passage
that overflowed into a secret passage,

the Middle Passage;⁸ made definitive
that muted walkway paved with sugar plate,
65 its sugar-paper walls hand-painted with
hieroglyphs invisible as sweat
but speaking volumes; leading to the sweet
peardrop of a stairwell down and down
70 to this same room of aromatic brown

in miniature. Here, connoisseur, I've set
the doll, rough hewn from sugarcane's sweet wood:
her choker, hardboiled sweets as black as jet;
her dress, molasses-rich; her features, hard.
75 This handcarved doll, with sugar in her blood—
Europe, the Caribbean, Africa;
baptised in sugar, named Angelica,

has built a tiny house in Demerara
sugar grains secured with sugarpaste,
each sculpted room a microscopic mirror
80 of its old self; and below stairs, she's placed
a blind doll with kaleidoscopic taste,

who boils, bakes, moulds, pipes, chisels, spins and
blows
sugar, her art, the only tongue she knows.

2014

Endnotes

- Note 1: Harewood House, a country house in England built in 1759 for a plantation owner and enslaver.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Eighth Earl of Harewood; worked as a film and television producer.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Major Spanish painter (1851–1973) associated with the modernist movement of Cubism.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Blue ribbon (French).[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Historical region previously a Dutch and then British colony, now part of the country of Guyana. Demerara sugar is raw sugar extracted from sugarcane and originated in the colony.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A variety of apple.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In music, a thirty-second note.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: The stage of the transatlantic slave trade where enslaved Africans were transported from Africa to the Americas across the Atlantic Ocean.[Return to reference 8](#)

RACHEL CUSK

b. 1967

Rachel Cusk was born in Saskatoon, Canada, to affluent British parents. Her father, a Protestant, converted to Catholicism prior to marrying her mother and the Cusk children were raised Catholic. Cusk lived briefly in Canada and Los Angeles, California, before moving to Suffolk, England, in 1974. She recalls moving frequently as a child and associating relocation with her family's discomfort with emotional confrontation. Rather than address difficult feelings, they would simply change settings. Cusk attended St. Mary's, a convent boarding school in Cambridge, and studied English at New College, Oxford. She has taught Creative Writing at Kingston University.

Cusk's early novels *Saving Agnes* (1993), which won the Whitbread First Novel Award, *The Temporary* (1995), and *The Country Life* (1997) feature young, well-educated women as their protagonists. Each of these women shares a sense of dissatisfaction and lack of direction: they are not living up to their potential. Cusk delves into the consciousness of her characters with a satire and wit that illuminates the gap between their desire for iconoclasm and their tendency to fall back into the roles of conventional femininity. Such protagonists are vulnerable to self-delusion, and Cusk's cool, sometimes cruel, narrative voice uses their own ruminations to skewer them.

Moving between fiction and autobiography in the early 2000s, Cusk continued to explore the compromises and disappointments of

the privileged classes. *In the Fold* (2006) and *Arlington Park* (2006) explore the ennui of parents, especially wives and mothers who find little reward in the mundanity of their suburban lives. In this period, Cusk also published a searing memoir about pregnancy. In *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2001), she contextualizes the experience of her first pregnancy within the public culture of motherhood. She finds such a culture, with its parenting manuals, dietary guidelines, and standards of achievement, to be conformist to its core. Further, it belittles the loss of female freedom as one's body becomes the object of another's needs, expectations, and demands: "My sex has become an exiguous, long-laid, lovingly furnished trap into which I have inadvertently wandered and from which now there is no escape. I have been tagged, as if electronically, by pregnancy. My womanly movements are being closely monitored." Cusk's dissection of sex and gender opens up meditations on the buried monstrosities of motherhood and the panic that issues from its confinements.

Cusk's memoirs allude to the absence of pregnant women and struggling mothers from canonical literature and how that literary invisibility compounds the sense of erasure she felt during her own early days of motherhood. Rather than regard marriage and motherhood as essential conditions of female accomplishment, she gives written form to the negative and improper feelings that accompany them. She also admits failure in *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (2012), which chronicled the dissolution of her first marriage and laid the groundwork for the experimental shift that would characterize her most important work to date: *The Outline Trilogy*.

Consisting of *Outline* (2014), *Transit* (2016), and *Kudos* (2018), *The Outline Trilogy* established Cusk as a leading writer of "autofiction," a subgenre of the novel in which the distinction between the author and the protagonist is deliberately blurred. While autobiographical novels are nothing new (as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* attest), twenty-first-century novelists associated with autofiction (for

example, Sheila Heti, Karl Ove Knausgård, and Ben Lerner) have expressed doubt about the capacity of the novel to represent reality. They turn instead to a highly personal interrogation of the writing process and question the foundational components of the novel as a genre. Cusk in particular has professed her lack of interest in the components of character and plot. She regards these elements of the novel as artifices of fiction-writing rather than the necessary formal devices for creating a literary work authentic to life.

Cusk published excerpts of *The Outline Trilogy* in *The Paris Review* while completing each volume. "Freedom" is one such excerpt that shows the relationship between choice and constraint to be more complicated than a simple opposition. Set in an upscale hair salon, it features a female first-person narrator whose primary role is to observe and become a medium for others, in this case, her hair stylist, to reflect on their own lives. Such a technique serves to establish and then question the truth of perception until the ground beneath the storyteller's feet falls away. As Cusk's style reveals itself, the reader, like the narrator, observes how ordinary choices, such as the decision to color graying hair, can lead to minor constraint, and how minor constraint can portend the extraordinary need for release.

Freedom

I asked Dale whether he could try to get rid of the gray.

It was growing dark outside, and the rain against the salon's big windows looked like ink running down a page. The traffic crawled along the blackened road beyond. The cars all had their lights on. Dale was standing behind me in the mirror, lifting long, dry fistfuls of hair and then letting them fall. His eyes were moving all over my image with a devouring expression. His face was portentous, and I watched it in the glass.

"There's nothing wrong with a few sparkles," he said reproachfully.

The other stylist, who was standing behind a customer at the next chair, half closed her long sleepy lids and smiled.

"I get mine done," she said. "A lot of people do."

"We're talking about a commitment," Dale said. "You have to keep coming back every six weeks. That's a life sentence," he added darkly, his eyes meeting mine in the mirror. "I'm just saying you need to be sure."

The other stylist looked at me sidelong with her sphinxlike smile.

"A lot of people don't find that a problem," she said. "Their lives are mostly commitments anyway. At least if it makes you feel good, that's something."

Dale asked whether my hair had ever been dyed before. The dye could accumulate, apparently, and the hair become synthetic looking and dull. It was the accumulation rather than the color itself that resulted in an unnatural appearance. People bought box after box of those home dyeing kits in search of a lifelike shade, and all they were doing was making their hair look more and more like a matted wig. But that was apparently preferable to a natural touch of frost. In fact, where hair was concerned, Dale said, the fake generally seemed to be more real than the real: so long as what they saw in

the mirror wasn't the product of nature, it didn't seem to matter to most people if their hair looked like a shop-front dummy's. Though he did have one client, an older lady, who wore her gray hair loose all the way to her waist. Like an elder's beard, her hair struck Dale as her wisdom: she carried herself like a queen, he said, streaming power in the form of this gray mane. He lifted my hair again in his hands, holding it aloft and then letting it drop, while we looked at each other in the mirror.

"We're talking about your natural authority," Dale said.

The woman in the next chair was reading *Glamour* magazine with an expressionless face, while the other stylist's fingers worked at her intricately tinsel head, painting each strand of hair and folding it into a neat foil parcel. The stylist was diligent and careful, though her client didn't once glance up to look.

The salon was a lofty, white, brilliantly lit room with white-painted floorboards and baroque, velvet-upholstered furniture. The tall mirrors had elaborately carved white-painted frames. The light came from three big branching chandeliers that hung from the ceiling and were duplicated in dazzling reflection all around the mirrored walls. It stood in a row of dingy shops and fast-food outlets and hardware stores. The big plate-glass shop front sometimes rattled when a heavy vehicle passed outside.

In the mirror, Dale's expression was unyielding. His own hair was a dark, artful mop of gray-streaked curls. He was somewhere in his mid-forties, tall and narrow, with the elegant, upright bearing of a dancer. He wore a dark, closely fitted jersey that showed the suggestion of a potbelly above his lean hips.

"It doesn't fool anyone, you know," he said. "It just makes it obvious that you've got something to hide."

I said that seemed preferable to having what you wished hidden on public display.

"Why?" Dale said. "What's so terrible about looking like what you are?"

I didn't know, I said, but it was obviously something a lot of people feared.

"You're telling me," Dale said glumly. "A lot of people," he went on, "say it's because what they see in the mirror doesn't feel like them. I say to them, Why doesn't it? I say, What you need isn't a color wash, it's a change of attitude. I think it's the pressure," Dale said. "What people are frightened of," he said, lifting the back of my hair to look underneath, "is being unwanted."

At the other end of the room, the big glass door jangled open and a boy of twelve or thirteen came in out of the darkness. He left the door standing ajar and the cold wet air and roaring noise of traffic came in great gusts into the warm, lit-up salon.

"Can you close the door, please?" Dale called in a peevish voice.

The boy stood, frozen, a panicked expression on his face. He wore no coat, only a gray school shirt and trousers. His shirt and hair were wet from the rain. A few seconds later, a woman came in after him through the open door and closed it carefully behind her. She was very tall and upright, with a large, angular face and mahogany-colored hair carefully cut in a bob that hung exactly at the square line of her jaw. Seeing her, the boy raised his hand to plaster his own hair sideways over his forehead. The woman stood for a moment, her large eyes moving around the room, and then she said to the boy:

"Go on then. Go and give them your name."

The boy looked at her with a pleading expression. His shirt was undone at the collar, and a patch of his pale, bony chest could be seen. His arms hung by his sides, the palms opened in protest.

"Go on," she said.

Dale asked whether I was ready to have my hair washed; he would go through the color charts while I was gone and see if he could find a match. Nothing too dark, he said; I'm thinking more browns and reds, something lighter. Even if it's not what you naturally are, he said, I think you'll look more real that way. He called across to the girl who was sweeping the floors that there was a customer ready to go down. She automatically stopped sweeping and leaned the broom against the wall.

"Don't leave it there," Dale said. "Someone might trip over it and hurt themselves."

Again automatically, she turned around and, retrieving the broom, stood there holding it.

"In the cupboard," Dale said wearily. "Just put it in the cupboard."

She went away and returned empty-handed, and then came to stand beside my chair. I rose and followed her down some steps to the warm, lightless alcove where the sinks were. She fastened a nylon cape around my shoulders, and then arranged a towel on the edge of the sink so that I could lean back.

"Is that all right?" she said.

The water came in a spray, with alternating passages of hot and cold. I closed my eyes, following the successions and returns, the displacement of one temperature by another and then its reinstatement: they were so different from one another, yet each was mildly uncomfortable to the same degree. The girl rubbed shampoo over my head with tentative fingers. Later she tugged a comb through the hair and I waited, as though waiting for someone to untangle a mathematical problem.

"There you are," she said finally, stepping back from the sink.

I thanked her and returned to the salon, where Dale was absorbedly mixing a paste with a small paintbrush in a pink plastic dish. The boy was now sitting in the chair next to mine, and the *Glamour*-reading woman had withdrawn, her hair still in its foil parcels, to the sofa by the window, where she continued to turn the pages expressionlessly one after another. Next to her sat the woman who had come in with the boy. She was tapping at the screen of her mobile phone; a book lay beside her on the seat. The other stylist was leaning with her elbow on the reception desk, a cup of coffee beside her, talking to the receptionist.

"Sammy," Dale called to her, "your client's waiting."

Sammy exchanged a few more remarks with the receptionist and then ambled back to the chair.

"So," she said, putting her hands on the boy's shoulders so that he involuntarily flinched. "What's it going to be, then?"

"Do you ever get the feeling," Dale said to me, "that if you weren't there to make things happen, it would all just go tits-up?"¹

I said it seemed to me that just as often the reverse was true: people could become more capable when the person they relied on to tell them what to do wasn't there.

"I must be doing something wrong then," Dale said. "This lot couldn't run a bath without my help."

He picked up one of a set of silver clips and fastened it to a section of my hair. The dye would need to stay in for at least half an hour, he said: he hoped I wasn't in a hurry. He took a second clip and isolated another section. I watched his face in the mirror as he worked. He took a third clip and held it between his lips while he separated one strand of hair from another.

"Actually I'm in no particular rush myself," he said presently. "My date for this evening just canceled. Luckily," he said, "as it turns out."

In the next-door chair, the boy sat staring interestedly at himself in the mirror.

"What do you fancy?" Sammy said. "Mohican?² Buzz cut?"

He gave a sort of twitch of his shoulders and looked away. He had a soft, sallow face, with a long, rounded nose that gave him a ruminative expression. A strange, secretive smile was forever playing around his plump pink mouth. Finally he murmured something, so quietly that it was inaudible.

"What's that?" Sammy said.

She bent her head down toward him but he failed to repeat it.

"Strange as it might sound," Dale was saying, "I was quite relieved. And this is a person I really like." He paused while he fastened a section of hair with a clip. "I just keep getting this feeling more and more these days"—he paused again to fasten another—"that it's more trouble than it's worth."

What was, I asked him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, "maybe it's just an age thing. I just feel like I can't be bothered."

There had been a time, he went on, when the prospect of spending an evening alone would have terrified him, would actually have seemed so weird and immense and empty that he would have gone anywhere and done anything just to avoid it. But now he found that he'd just as soon be on his own.

"And if other people have a problem with that," he said, "like I say, I can't be bothered with them."

I watched his dark figure in the glass, the fastidiousness of his quick fingers, the concentration on his long, narrow face. Behind him, the receptionist was approaching with a phone in her hand. She tapped his shoulder and held it out to him.

"For you," she said.

"Ask them to leave a message," Dale said. "I'm with a client."

The receptionist went away again and he rolled his eyes.

"I persist in the belief that this is a creative job," he said. "But sometimes you have to wonder."

He knew quite a lot of creative people, he went on after a while. It was just a type he happened to get on with. He had one friend in particular, a plumber, who made sculptures in his spare time. These sculptures were constructed entirely from materials he used in his plumbing job: lengths of pipe, valves and washers, drains, waste traps, you name it. He had a sort of blowtorch he used to heat the metal and bend it into different shapes.

"He makes them in his garage," Dale said. "They're actually quite good. The thing is, he can only do it when he's off his trolley."³

He took a new section of hair and began to fix the clips around it.

On what, I said.

"Crystal meth," Dale said. "The rest of the time he's quite a normal bloke. But like I say, in his spare time he gets himself tanked up on crystal meth and locks himself in his garage. He says that sometimes he'll wake up on his garage floor in the morning and there'll be this thing beside him that he's made and he's got no memory at all of making it. He can't remember a thing. It must be

really strange," Dale said, inserting the last clip with pincer-like fingers. "Like seeing a part of yourself that's invisible."

He liked his friends—he thought he might have given me the wrong impression earlier—though he knew plenty of people who were still carrying on at forty the way they had been at twenty-five: he actually found it slightly depressing, the spectacle of grown men frenziedly partying, still shoving things up their noses and whirling like brides on packed dance floors; personally, he had better things to do.

He straightened up and examined his work in the mirror, his fingertips resting lightly on my shoulders.

"The thing is," he said, "that kind of life—the parties, the drugs, the staying up all night—is basically repetitive. It doesn't get you anywhere and it isn't meant to, because what it represents is freedom." He picked up the pink plastic dish and stirred its contents with the paintbrush. "And to stay free," he said, coating the brush with the thick brown paste, "you have to reject change."

I asked him what he meant by that, and he stood for a moment with his eyes fixed on mine in the mirror, the paintbrush suspended in midair. Then he looked away again, taking a strand of hair and applying the paste to it with careful strokes.

"Well it's true, isn't it," he said, somewhat petulantly.

I said I wasn't sure: when people freed themselves, they usually forced change on everyone else. But it didn't necessarily follow that to stay free was to stay the same. In fact, the first thing people sometimes did with their freedom was to find another version of the thing that had imprisoned them. Not changing, in other words, deprived them of what they'd gone to such trouble to attain.

"It's a bit like a revolving door," Dale said. "You're not inside and you're not outside. You can stay in it going round and round for as long as you like, and as long as you're doing that you can call yourself free." He laid aside the strand of painted hair and began to paint a new section. "All I'm saying," he said, "is that freedom is overrated."

Next door to us, Sammy was running her fingers through the boy's dark, unruly hair, feeling its texture and its length, while his eyes looked sideways in alarm. His hands gripped the chrome armrests of his chair. She swept the hair first to one side, then the other, looking closely at him in the mirror, then picked up her comb and made a neat parting down the middle. The boy looked immediately anxious and Sammy laughed.

"I'll leave it like that, shall I?" she said, "Don't panic, only joking. It's just so that I can get it the same length on both sides. You don't want to go around with your hair all different lengths, do you?"

The boy looked away again silently.

"What's it called," Dale said, "when you have one of those bloody great blinding flashes of insight that changes the way you look at things?"

I said I wasn't sure: a few different words sprang to mind.

Dale twitched his paintbrush irritably.

"It's something to do with a road," he said.

Road to Damascus,⁴ I said.

"I had a road to Damascus moment," he said. "Last New Year's Eve, of all times. I bloody hate New Year's. That was part of it, realizing that I bloody hated New Year's Eve."

A group of them had been at his flat, he said. They were getting ready to go out, and he starting thinking about the fact that he hated it and thinking that everyone else probably hated it, too, but that no one was prepared to say so. When everyone had their coats on, he announced that he'd decided to stay at home.

"I just suddenly couldn't be bothered," he said.

Why not, I said.

For a long time he didn't reply, painting the strands of hair one after another until I thought he either hadn't heard my question or was choosing to ignore it.

"I was sitting there on my sofa," he said, "and it just suddenly happened."

He stirred the paintbrush in the dish, coating each side again carefully with the brown paste.

"It was this bloke," he said. "I didn't really know him. He was sitting there doing lines⁵ that he'd laid out all neatly for himself on the coffee table. I suddenly just felt really sorry for him. I don't know what it was about him," Dale said. "He'd lost all his hair, poor bastard."

He unclipped a new section and began to paint it. I watched the way he distributed the paste all along the strand in even strokes. He started at the root but became more meticulous the further away from it he got, as though he had learned to resist the temptation to concentrate his labors there at the beginning.

"He had this funny, pudgy little face," Dale said, pausing with his paintbrush in the air. "It must have been the combination of the baldness and the funny face that did it. I thought, That bloke looks like a baby. What's a baby doing sitting on my sofa shoving coke up his nose? And once I'd started seeing it that way, I couldn't stop. Suddenly they all started looking like that. It was a bit like being on acid," he said, dipping his paintbrush again in the dish, "if I can cast my mind back that far."

Sammy had started gingerly snipping the boy's hair with a pair of scissors.

"What sort of things are you into, then?" she asked him.

He gave a little shrug, the secretive smile on his lips.

"Football?" she said. "Or the what's it called—the Xbox.⁶ All you boys are into those, aren't you? Do you play Xbox with your friends?"

The boy shrugged again.

Everyone obviously thought he was completely mad, Dale went on, for staying at home while all of them went off clubbing. He had had to pretend he was ill. Once upon a time it would have terrified him, the prospect of spending New Year's Eve alone, but on this occasion he couldn't get rid of them fast enough. He suddenly felt he'd seen through it, seen through them all. What he'd realized in his Damascene moment was that the people in his sitting room—

himself included—weren't adults: they were children in overgrown bodies.

"And I don't mean," he said, "to sound patronizing when I say that."

"My little girl's about your age," Sammy was saying to the boy in the next chair. "You're what, eleven, twelve?"

The boy did not reply.

"You look about the same age as her," Sammy said. "With her and her friends it's all makeup and boys now. You'd think they're a bit young to be starting all that, wouldn't you? But you can't stop them. The problem with girls," she went on, "is they don't have as many hobbies as boys. They don't have as many things to do. They sit around talking while the boys are out playing football. You wouldn't believe," she said, "how complicated their relationships are already. It's all that talking: if they were outside running around they wouldn't have time for all the politics." She moved around the back of his chair, still snipping. "Girls can be quite nasty, can't they?"

The boy glanced over at the woman he had come in with. She had put down her phone and was now sitting reading her book.

"That your mum?" Sammy said.

The boy nodded.

"She must find you quiet," Sammy said. "My daughter never shuts up. Can you hold your head still, please?" she added, pausing the scissors in mid-air. "I can't cut it if you keep moving your head. No," she went on, "she never stops talking, my daughter. She's yakking all day from morning to night, on the phone to her friends."

While she spoke, the boy was moving his eyes up and down and from side to side while his head remained motionless, as if he were having an eye test.

"It's all about your friends at your age, isn't it?" Sammy said.

By now it was completely dark outside. Inside the salon, all the lights were on. There was music playing, and the droning sound of passing traffic could be faintly heard from the street. There was a great bank of glass shelves against one wall where hair products

stood for sale in pristine rows, and when a lorry⁷ passed too close outside, it shuddered slightly and the jars and bottles rattled in their places. The room had become a chamber of reflecting surfaces while the world outside became opaque. Everywhere you looked, there was only the reflection of what was already there. Often I had walked past the salon in the dark and had glanced in through the windows. From the darkness of the street, it was almost like a theater, with the characters moving around in the bright light of the stage.

After that episode, Dale said, he had had a period in which every time he saw someone he knew or spoke to them—and increasingly with people he didn't know, with clients or strangers in the street—he was literally plagued by this sense of them as children in adults' bodies. He saw it in their gestures and mannerisms, in their competitiveness, their anxiety, their anger and joy, most of all in their needs, both physical and emotional: even the people he knew who were in stable partnerships—relationships he had once envied for their companionship and intimacy—now looked to him like no more than best friends in the playground. For weeks he went around in a sort of fog of pity for the human race, "like some bloke from the Middle Ages wandering about in sackcloth⁸ ringing a bell." It was quite disabling, he said: some days he actually felt physically weak and could barely drag himself to the salon. People assumed he was depressed, "and maybe I was," Dale said, "but I knew I was doing something I had to do, I was going somewhere, and I wasn't going back if it bloody killed me." At the end of it, he felt empty, in the sense of minimalism, like he'd had a massive mental clear-out. Thinking back to that New Year's Eve, what he'd felt was that there had been something enormous in the room that everyone else was pretending wasn't there.

I asked him what it was.

He was squatting down behind me by now, painting the hair at the back, so I couldn't see his face. After a while he stood up, reappearing in the mirror with the plastic dish in one hand and the paintbrush in the other.

"Fear," he said. "And I thought, I'm not running away from it. I'm going to stay here until it's gone." He scrutinized the painted hair from all sides, like an artist examining a finished canvas. "It shouldn't be long now," he said. "We'll leave it to settle in for a bit."

He just had to go and make a quick call, if I would excuse him. He had his nephew staying with him at the moment; he ought to let him know that his plans for this evening had changed and that he'd be home after all.

"With any luck," Dale said, "he might even have found it in himself to cook something."

I asked where his nephew had come from, and he said Scotland.

"And not one of the trendy bits," he said. "For some reason my sister keeps herself in the arse-end of nowhere." He'd been there once or twice to visit her, and it was only forty-eight hours before he was seriously considering talking to the sheep.

The nephew was a funny fellow, Dale said: everyone had decided he was autistic or had Asperger's or whatever it is people call you these days when you're not like everyone else. He'd left school with no qualifications: when Dale went up to visit, he was unemployed and would sit throwing rocks down the hill into the quarry for amusement.

"He's changed a bit since then, fortunately. The other night he even asked me whether I'd used fresh herbs in the pasta sauce, or 'just' "—Dale made the inverted commas with his fingers—"the dried ones."

I asked how the boy had ended up coming to London, and Dale said it was after a conversation he'd had with his sister. She told him the boy had started saying things to her that were freaking her out, that he felt he was living in the wrong body or living in the wrong person or something like that.

"He doesn't say a word in months," Dale said, "and then he suddenly comes out with that. She didn't know what to make of it. She asked me what I thought it meant." He shrugged. "I'm a hairdresser," he said, "not a psychologist." He picked at a few stray strands on my head. "But obviously I had a hunch. I told him if he

could pack a bag and get himself on a train, he could stay with me in London. I said to him, I'm not looking for company: I like my life just the way it is. I've got a nice flat and a nice business and I want to keep them that way. You'd have to do your share, I said, and I'm not putting someone up who doesn't work, because I'm not a bloody charity. But you'd have your freedom, I said, and London's a big place. If you can't find what you're looking for here, you won't find it anywhere. And a week later," Dale said, "the doorbell rings and there he is."

He hadn't been entirely surprised, he admitted: his sister had tipped him off a couple of days earlier, "just so I'd have time to hide anything she might not approve of." And for those two days, he did find himself having some second thoughts. He wandered around the rooms of his flat, noticing their cleanliness and order; he savored the peace of the place, his freedom to come and go as he liked, to return home after work and find it all just as he had left it. "The idea," he said, "of having someone always there, someone I had to talk to and clean up after, someone I would basically have responsibility for, because at sixteen you're really still a child and this one had never been outside a tiny Scottish village in his life: well, you get my drift," Dale said. "I thought, I must be insane, giving all this up."

I asked whether any of those fears had been realized, and he was silent for a moment. I watched him in the mirror, his arms crossed over his stomach, where the faint paunch stood out from his lean, wolflike frame.

Obviously at the beginning, he said, they'd had some moments. He had to teach his nephew to do things as he liked them done, and nobody learns in an instant: he of all people knew that, from training up novices at the salon. You need time, he said, time and consistency. But it had been two months now, and they rubbed along together quite well. The boy had found work as a trainee mechanic; he had a bit of a budding social life, and even came out clubbing with Dale on occasion.

"When I can be bothered to put away the pipe and slippers," Dale said, "and haul myself out the door. Shared life," he went on, "can never be the same as being on your own. You lose something," he said, "and I don't know if you ever get it back. One day he'll leave, and the thought has occurred to me that I'll probably miss him; that the place might feel empty, where before it felt complete. I might have given up more than I bargained for," he said. "But you can't stop people coming in," he said, "and you can't ask what's in it for you when they do."

He crossed to the reception desk to get his phone, and I looked at the boy in the chair beside me, whose wild dark hair was now cropped short. He was shooting frequent, imploring looks at his mother, who remained determinedly absorbed in her book.

"That's coming on nicely," Sammy said to me. "You going anywhere special tonight?"

I said that I wasn't, though I had to go somewhere the following evening.

"You're usually good for two or three days if he styles it properly," Sammy said. "You should be all right. Right then," she said to the boy, "let's have a look at you."

She put her hands on his shoulders and faced him in the mirror.

"What do you think?" she said.

There was no reply.

"Come on," she said, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

I saw the boy's mother glance up from her book.

"We've got a right one here," Sammy said. "A right man of mystery."

The boy's knuckles were white where they gripped the armrests of his chair. His sallow face was pale and clenched. Sammy released her hands and in an instant he had sprung to his feet and was tearing off the nylon gown that was fastened around his shoulders.

"Take it easy!" Sammy said, stepping back with her palms raised. "There's expensive equipment in here, you know."

With strange, lunging movements, the boy strode away from the chair toward the big glass door. His mother got to her feet, the book still in her hand, and watched as he yanked the door open and the black rainy street with its hissing traffic was revealed. He had pulled the handle so forcefully that the door continued to revolve all the way around on its hinges after he had let it go. It traveled farther and farther, until finally it collided heavily with the tiers of glass shelving where the hair-care products stood in their neat rows. The boy stood frozen in the open doorway, his pale face lit up, his hair as though standing on end, and watched as the bank of shelves disgorged a landslide of bottles and jars which fell and rolled with a great thundering sound out across the salon floor, and then itself collapsed in a tremendous shrieking cascade of breaking glass.

There was a moment of silence in which everyone stood absolutely still, Dale with the phone in his hand, Sammy holding the boy's discarded cape, the mother with the book clasped in her fingers; even the *Glamour*-reading woman finally looked up from her magazine.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Sammy said.

The boy shot out through the doorway and disappeared into the wet, black street. For a few instants, his mother stayed where she was, in the glittering field of bottles and broken glass. She wore an expression of stony dignity. She stared at Sammy, her eyes unblinking. Then she picked up her bag, carefully put her book in it, and walked out after her son, leaving the door open behind her.

2016

Endnotes

- Note 1: Fail or fall apart (slang).[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A hairstyle with the sides of the head shaved, leaving long hair down the middle of the scalp.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Crazy (British slang).[Return to reference 3](#)

- Note 4: The site of Paul's conversion to Christianity. Paul, under his birth name Saul, had been a Pharisee and persecutor of early Christians. A road-to-Damascus (Damascene) moment is one of insight or revelation.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Lines of powdered drugs for snorting.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Video game console.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Transport truck (British English).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Coarse fabric worn in the Bible to signify grief or self-punishment.[Return to reference 8](#)

KIRAN DESAI

b. 1971

Born in New Delhi to Indian parents, Kiran Desai emigrated from India to England in 1985, when she was fourteen years old, and then to the United States a year later. Her mother, Anita Desai (b. 1937), is an acclaimed fiction writer, whose own mother was a German Jew and whose father was Bengali. Kiran Desai received a B.A. from Bennington College in Vermont in 1993, before continuing to study creative writing at Hollins University in Virginia and Columbia University in New York City, where she received her M.F.A. in 1999. An Indian citizen, she emphasizes in interviews that, despite living in the United States, she sees “everything through the lens of being an Indian,” working from the “precise emotional location” of being “part of the Indian diaspora.”

Anthologizing an early story of Desai’s, Salman Rushdie hailed her work as “welcome proof that India’s encounter with the English language, far from proving abortive, continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts.” Desai’s fiction alludes to, and builds on, Rushdie’s carnivalesque humor, magically talented children, and fusion of folktale with historical fiction; V. S. Naipaul’s bleak transnational portraits of postcolonial despair; and Gabriel García Márquez’s family dramas and magical realist plots. As a writer with a global array of influences, when Desai won the Man Booker Prize in 2006 (as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award), she celebrated literature’s boundary-traversing capacities:

Literature is located beyond flags and anthems, simple ideas of loyalty. The vocabulary of immigration, of exile, of translation, inevitably overlaps with a realization of the multiple options for reinvention, of myriad perspectives, shifting truths, telling of lies—the great big wobbliness of it all. In a world obsessed with national boundaries and belonging, as a novelist working with a form also traditionally obsessed with place, it was a journey to come to this thought, that the less structured, the multiple, may be a possible location for fiction, perhaps a more valid ethical location in general.

The work for which Desai won the Man Booker, her expansive second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), interleaves and layers plots in multiple locations, spanning India, England, and the United States, tracking a variety of characters in India and the Indian diaspora who live out the disparate impact of globalization and postcolonial history on the world's rich and its poor.

Desai's comic first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), is more firmly situated in a single locale, a small town in northern India, south of the Himalayas, although even this relatively isolated place is traversed by modernity. Part folktale, part realist short story, "The Sermon on the Guava Tree," which was published separately but later incorporated into the novel, offers a glimpse into Desai's fruitful commingling of the English language and its literatures with the author's Indian heritage. A dreamy, indolent young man, Sampath Chawla, refusing his father's proddings toward material success, has taken refuge in a guava tree. His predictably middle-class father, the cartoonish Mr. Chawla, had found him a solid job at a post office, but once Sampath is fired, he climbs to the solitude of his leafy new home. In a 1998 interview, Desai commented on the story's origins:

I started with a very small idea, really. I'd read a story in the *Times of India* and heard about a character from many people, a man who was a very famous hermit in India who really did climb up a tree, who lived in a tree for many, many years, until

he died. He died last year, I believe. So I began to wonder what it was about someone like this who would do something as extreme as to spend his life in a tree. So it started really with that character, and then the story built up around it.

This bizarre situation takes a still stranger turn when Sampath, whose name means “wealth” or “good fortune” in Hindi, turns out to be not such a deadbeat after all, assuming unsuspected powers akin to those of an omniscient narrator. Telling his story, Desai ironically examines intergenerational and gender relations amid the small town’s social panoply. Along with memorable characterization, good-humored satire, and realism interfused with folktale, Desai builds the story through the precise use of figurative language (“the breeze ran over the foliage the way a hand runs over an animal’s dark fur to expose a silvery underside”) and comic dialogue in Indianized English (“You are the Number One most strange mother in the world”). Desai both expands and refines the array of characters, settings, plots, tropes, and themes to be found in contemporary literature in English.

The Sermon in the Guava Tree

The day that Sampath Chawla moved into a guava tree, his family—father, mother, grandmother, and sister Pinky—took up residence outside the local police station of the small town of Shahkot. They sat on the bench beneath the station's prize yellow rose creeper and waited for news. That is, the three women sat on the bench while Mr. Chawla walked around and around the building, making the policemen dizzy by shouting through every window he passed during his revolutions. If he himself were the police chief, he said, Sampath would be right this minute ensconced in his usual vegetable-like stupor among them.

"How is it you cannot find my son?" he shouted. Surely he had suffered quite enough already where Sampath was concerned. Look at how badly he had turned out! At school, he succeeded only at failing more reliably than anyone else. And then, instead of pulling up his socks and working hard at the job Mr. Chawla begged for him at the post office, he had gotten himself fired for his incompetence. "How could you do that?" his father had said. "You have done it on purpose so now you can spend all your time doing nothing." But Sampath had merely looked at him with a blank and hopeless expression. No doubt he would spend the rest of his days drooping about the house and dreaming in the tea stalls, or singing to himself in the public gardens. If they managed to find him again, that is. "You must find my son!" he shouted at the police chief.

The town made the most of the drama. Neighbors came by regularly for news, and everyone called out their support on their way back and forth from the marketplace. In some places there are people of quiet disposition and few words. But around Shahkot this was the very rare exception.

For one awful day it seemed as if Sampath had vanished forever. But the next morning the watchman of the university research forest, who had bicycled into town to bring his married sister some

curd,¹ also brought the news that beyond the compound of the retired district judge a strange man had climbed a tree and not come back down. Nobody knew why. The man, he said, would answer no questions.

"If someone in this country is crazy enough to climb up a tree, you can be sure it is Sampath," said Mr. Chawla. "There is no doubting the matter."

Holding hands, the family ran together to the bus stop, their rubber slippers slapping against their heels. They caught the same bus Sampath had taken the day before, when who knows what compulsion had driven him far from his home up into the guava tree. Here, in the place where he had taken up residence, the Chawlas made their way down the crisscross of little paths leading into an old orchard that had once borne enough fruit for it to be shipped and sold in New Delhi. But the orchard had been abandoned long ago, the fruit turning sour and the branches growing into each other, and was used now only by an occasional goatherd grazing his flock.

Searching for Sampath, the family clacked about the trees and shouted up into the leaves, the three women uttering his name with mournful wails, Mr. Chawla shouting like an Army major. At last, at the far corner of the farthest guava grove, right near the crumbling wall that bordered the forest, they discovered Sampath, sitting in his tree, his legs dangling beneath him. He had been watching their efforts with some alarm.

What on earth was he to say? He imagined himself declaring, "I am happy over here." Or asking, in a surprised fashion, "But why have you come to visit me?" He could answer their accusations with a defiant "But for some people it is normal to sit in trees." Or, serene with newfound dignity, he could say, "I am adopting a simple way of life. From now on I have no relatives." However, he did not like the thought of hurting anyone's feelings.

In the end, as it happened, he said nothing at all.

"What are you doing up there?" shouted Mr. Chawla. "Get down at once!" Sampath looked sturdily into the leafy world about him, trying to steady his wildly fluttering heart. He concentrated on the

way the breeze ran over the foliage the way a hand runs over an animal's dark fur to expose a silvery underside.

Pinky felt a sudden surge of embarrassment for her brother. "Get out of the tree—the whole family is being shamed," she said bitterly.

His grandmother exclaimed, "Come down, Sampath, please. You are going to fall sick up there. Look at his thin yellow face! We had better go for the doctor."

Still he was silent.

Looking at her son, Mrs. Chawla felt her girlhood come rushing back to her, engulfing her in the memory of a time when a desperation she had sometimes felt rose and surrounded her like an enormous wall. "Let him be," she said.

"Let him be!" said Mr. Chawla. "Do families allow their sons to climb up trees? You are the Number One most strange mother in the world. Your son leaves home and climbs up a tree and you say, 'Let him be.' With you as his mother no wonder he has turned out like this. How can I keep normality within this family? I take it as a full-time job and yet it defies possibility. We must formulate a plan. Only monkeys climb up trees."

Sampath clutched at the branch he was sitting on and held on tight.

Monkeys climbed trees. Beetles lived in trees. Ants crawled up and down them. Birds sat in them. People used them for fruit and firewood, and underneath them they made each other's acquaintance in the few months between the time they got married and the time the babies arrived. But for someone to travel a considerable distance just to sit in a tree was preposterous. For that person to be sitting there a few days later was more preposterous still.

In desperation, the family called upon Dr. Banerjee, from the clinic in the bazaar, and, an energetic man, he arrived at once to view his patient. He had a mustache and round glasses and a degree from the medical school in Ranchi.² "Come down!" he shouted good-humoredly. "How do you expect me to examine you while you're sitting up in a tree?"

But, oh no, Sampath was no fool. He would not climb down to be caught and—who knows!—be put into a cage and driven off to the insane asylum on Alipur Road like the madman who had interrupted the ladies' home-economics class in the university and been lured and trapped by a single sweet. So, at the family's pleading, Dr. Banerjee, who prided himself on being a good sport, hoisted himself into the tree, stethoscope and blood-pressure pump about his neck. He climbed all the way up to Sampath so he could look into his eyes and ears, check his tongue, listen to his heart, take his blood pressure, and hit his knee with an expertly aimed karatelike move of his hand. Then he climbed down and got back into the scooter rickshaw he had arrived in. "He is a crazy person," he said, beaming, the mirth of the entire situation too much for him. "Nobody except for God can do anything about that." And he disappeared back into town.

The family went to see the doctor of Tibetan medicine who had been recommended by their neighbor Lakshmiji. "A variety of cures may be prescribed," he said. "For example, medicines derived from the scorpion, the sea scorpion, the sea dragon, and the sea mouse."

"What sea mouse? There is no such thing as sea mouse!" shouted Mr. Chawla, and he dragged the family from the dark little clinic to the homeopathic and Ayurvedic doctors, and then to the naturopath who lived all the way in Kajuwala.³

Dutifully, they pounded pellets into powders, brewed teas, and counted out the homeopathic pills that looked and smelled promising but wrought none of the miraculous changes they had been assured of.

Finally, they visited the holy man who lived outside the tea stall near the deer park. "Sorry to disturb you. Our son is afflicted."

"How is he afflicted?"

"He is suffering from madness."

"Is he shouting?"

"No."

"Having fits?"

"No."

"Is he tearing his hair out?"

"No."

"Is he biting his neighbors? Biting himself? Is he sleepwalking? Does he stick out his tongue and roll his eyes? Is he rude to strangers?"

"No. He eats and sleeps and takes good care of his hair. He doesn't shout and he doesn't bite himself. He has never been rude to strangers."

"Then he is not mad."

"But he is sitting up in a tree!"

"Arrange a marriage for him. Then you can rest in peace. You will have no further problems."

It is necessary at some point for every family to acquire a daughter-in-law.⁴ This girl must come from a good family. She must have a pleasant personality—decent and not shameless and bold. This girl should keep her eyes lowered and, because she is embarrassed and shy, her head bowed, as well. Nobody wants a girl who stares people right in the face with big froggy eyes. She should be fair-complexioned, but if she is dark the dowry must include at least one of the following items: a television set, a refrigerator, a Godrej brand steel cupboard,⁵ or a motor scooter. When this girl sings, her voice must bring tears of feeling to the eyes. When she dances, people should exclaim "Wah!" in astounded pleasure. It should be made clear that she will not dance and sing after marriage and shame the family. This girl should have passed all her examinations in the first division⁶ but will listen respectfully as you lecture her on various subjects you yourself failed in secondary school. She must not stride, or kick up her legs like a horse. She must sit quietly, with knees together. She should talk just a little to show she can: one word, or maybe two after she has been coaxed and begged several times, "Just a few sentences. Just one sentence." Her mother should urge, "Eat something. Eat a laddoo.⁷ My daughter made these with her own hands." And these laddoos must not be recognizable as coming from the sweetmeat shop down the road.

She must be able to eat with knife and fork, or at least with a spoon. She should not be fat. She should be pleasantly plump, with large hips and breasts but a small waist. Talk of husband and children should so overcome her with shyness and embarrassment that she should hide her face, pink as a rosebud, in the fold of her sari. Then, if she has fulfilled all the requirements for a sound character and impressive accomplishments, if her parents have agreed to meet all the necessary financial contributions, if the fortune-tellers have decided the stars are lucky and the planets are compatible, everyone can laugh with relief and tilt her face up by the chin and say she is exactly what the family have been looking for, that she will be a daughter to their household. This, after all, is the boy's family. They're entitled to their sense of pride.

But the family could find only one prospective daughter-in-law. She was scrawny and dark. "Like a crow," Mrs. Chawla said indignantly when the first photograph was shown to them by their old neighbor Lakshmiji, who was acting as marriage broker. "You are trying to marry poor Sampath to a crow."

"He is lucky to find anyone at all," said Mr. Chawla, who had given up all hope of motor scooters and wedding parties at the Hans Raj Hotel.

The girl arrived, along with her family, on the public bus. Apart from her family, the bus was full of singing ladies and gentlemen, pilgrims returning from a trip to the Krishna temple⁸ in a neighboring town. The Chawla family watched as the bus veered off the road like a crazy beetle and moved toward them in a cloud of dust.

The bus driver had obligingly offered to drop off the family right at Sampath's orchard. A bride-to-be should not have to walk and grow dusty and be shown to disadvantage, he said sympathetically. He himself had a daughter to marry. "Yes, yes, let's take them directly to the boy," chorused the other passengers, pausing to make this decision before resuming their hymn singing.

Despite the driver's kindness and the attention she had received with the help of a handkerchief, a little spit, and a large amount of

talcum powder, the girl descended from the bus looking extremely dusty. The pilgrims, curious about what might happen during this unusual encounter between prospective marriage partners, tumbled out of the bus as well, in a messy and chaotic heap. They needed a break for lunch anyway, and a little private time behind some trees. Holding the prospective bride before them like a gift, the group moved toward the guava tree.

Sampath had always had a soft corner for the lady on the label of the coconut hair-oil bottle. He had spent a rather large amount of time in consideration of her mysterious smile upon the bathroom shelf. While squatting on the mildewed wooden platform taking his bucket baths, he had conducted a series of imagined encounters with her, complete with imagined conversations and imagined quarrels and reconciliations. She would meet him wreathed in the scent of the oil, with a smile as white as the gleaming inside of a coconut. A braid of hair had travelled downward from the top of the coconut lady's head and followed the undulations of the bottle. Sampath looked down at the veiled woman standing underneath his tree, and felt hot and horrified.

"Please come down and be introduced. You have sat in the tree long enough," said Mr. Chawla. Sampath thought he might faint.

"Climb up, daughter," the girl's father urged her. "Climb up. Come on. One step. Just a step."

The devotees raised the girl's rigid, unwilling form into the tree. "Up," they urged. Slowly she began to climb. She was encased in layers of shiny material like a large, expensive toffee. The cloth billowed about her, making her look absurdly stout. Her gold slippers slipped with every step. Her sari was pulled over her head and she held the edge of it between her teeth so as to keep as much of her face modestly covered as possible. It was clear this girl would not take well to life in a tree. It seemed an eternity before she neared Sampath. She paused and looked back down for further directions. Nobody knew quite what to expect, or how she should proceed. Even Mr. Chawla was at a loss as to what should happen next.

"Touch his feet!" someone finally shouted, in a moment of inspiration.

"Yes, touch his feet," the rest of the pilgrims cried, and, extending a single timid finger like a snail peeping from its shell, she gingerly poked at Sampath's toe. Her finger was as cold as ice, and moist. Sampath leaped up in horror. In an equal state of distress, the girl let out a faint cry. Losing her balance and her gold slippers, she tumbled indecorously out of the tree, accompanied by the more robust cries of the pilgrims and her family, who rushed at her with arms outstretched. But they failed to catch her as she fell, and she landed with a dull thump upon the ground.

The signs for marriage were not auspicious.

The devotees propped her against a tree and fanned her with a leafy branch. "What am I to do with this boy?" Mr. Chawla said, throwing his hands up in the air. "Tell me what I should do. The best education. A job. A wife. The world served to him on a platter, but, oh no, none of it is good enough for him. Mister here must run and sit in a tree. He is not in the least bit thankful for all that has been done for him."

The girl began to sneeze in tiny mouselike squeals. "Stop fanning her with that dirty branch!" someone shouted. "All the dust must have gone up her nose."

"Dust or no dust, it is yet one more inauspicious sign," another onlooker said.

Pinky felt terribly scornful of this third-rate woman who had responded to such a greatly consequential moment in her life by sneezing and whimpering. She gave her a good pinch from behind, hoping to see her jump, but the girl continued to squeak and sniffle. The talcum powder slid down her face in a milky river.

"What can I do?" Mr. Chawla asked of the crowd. "What am I to do with this boy?" He was sweating despite the pleasant breeze that rotated about them, laden with the scent of earth and burgeoning vegetation.

He was the head of a family and he liked it that way.

But oh! What good was it to be the head of a family when you had a son who ran and sat in a tree? Who slipped from beneath your fingers and shamed you?

"What am I to do?" he demanded of the devotees still milling about, to show them it was not for lack of effort and concern on his behalf that Sampath had ended up in such a pitiful state. He hit his forehead with the flat of his palm, for drama has a way of overriding the embarrassment of a situation that should be privately experienced.

The ladies and gentlemen from the bus felt a little sorry for him. "Yes, yes, how shameful," they muttered. "And coming from a decent family and all. Clearly the boy has been derailed."

They stared at Sampath, watching to see how his father's distress would affect him. Surely any son, even a son like Sampath, would respond to such a moving show of emotion. Sensitive to the atmosphere of expectation beneath him, Sampath looked down into their upturned eyes. He thought of his old school and the post office and entire roomfuls of people awaiting the answer to questions he had often not even heard. He wondered how it could be that he had never felt comfortable among people. "Go on with your own lives!" he wanted to shout. "Go on, go on! Leave me to mine."

But of course he could not say any such thing. In desperation he looked around him. Among the crowd of faces down below he recognized that of Mr. Singh, the brother-in-law of a neighbor in Shahkot. Mr. Singh, whose letters he had sometimes read in idle moments in the post office, steaming them open over glasses of tea or just prying them open, the humidity in the air having rendered the gum almost entirely ineffectual. Lazily, he had perused the contents of a large quantity of letters during his time at work. In a frantic plea for help, he shouted, "Mr. Singhji!"⁹

He remembered one particular letter sent by Mr. Singh to his father.

"Is your jewelry still safely buried beneath the tulsi¹ plant?"

Mr. Singh turned pale. "How do you know about my circumstances?" he asked.

Sampath caught sight of Mrs. Chopra. "How is that lump in your throat that travels up and down your windpipe, whispering threats and almost bursting right out of your chest?"

"*Hai*,"² she gasped, "who told you?"

Encouraged now by his success, Sampath brightened a little. He jabbed his finger at a bald-headed man in the crowd, and said. "And you, sir, that secret oil you got from the doctor in Side Gully. Clearly it is not working. Try a good massage with mustard oil, and your hair will sprout as thick and as plentiful as grass in the Cherrapunji rain."³

The devotees drove back into Shahkot with the news. There was a man up in the guava tree, a remarkable man. He had known all sorts of things. The dacoits⁴ were blackmailing poor Mr. Singh. Ratan Sinha had been using a special hair oil to no effect. An evil spirit had established itself in Mrs. Chopra's throat.

Clearly, there was more to this post-office clerk than to ordinary mortals. In his eyes they had detected a rare spirit.

It was at this point that Mr. Chawla had a realization—all of a sudden, with a tumble and rush of understanding, a realization so quick and so incredible in nature that his heart was caught in a state of constant pounding. Sampath might make his family's fortune. They could be rich! How many hermits were secretly wealthy? How many holy men were not at all the beggars they appeared to be? How many men of unfathomable wisdom possessed unfathomable bank accounts? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere. Already there was a change in the way people looked at Sampath; no longer did they snigger and smirk or make sympathetic noises with their tongues. Mr. Chawla kept his thoughts to himself and didn't say a word to anyone, but, in a sudden turnabout of policy, which both surprised and pleased his wife and his mother, who were already settling into the orchard as if it were their own long-lost home, he stopped berating Sampath for having climbed up the tree, and turned his attention to other matters.

Gradually, Sampath was provided with all sorts of comforts, and the more elaborate his living arrangements the happier he was. A

cot was raised up into the tree and fastened with rope. A striped umbrella donated by a friendly servant of the retired judge was positioned over Sampath's head. He made a lovely picture seated there amid the greenery, reclining on his cot at a slight angle to the world; propped against numerous cushions tucked up, during chilly evenings, in a glamorous satin quilt covered with leopard skin spots. On his head he sported a tea-cozy-like⁵ red woollen hat that had been knitted by his grandmother and raised to him on a stick. He was particularly fond of this hat, for it kept his head snug and warm at night when the breeze was chilly, and it kept the night rustlings, the crawling of little black beetles, ants, and moths, out of his ears as well.

"I'm comfortable," he announced to his family with a gesture of dismissal when he found everything to his satisfaction, leaving them for a minute bewildered, for they were yet to get used to this reversal in their relationship. How they had scolded him once upon a time for every little thing he had done. Now here he was waving at them as if he were a rajah⁶ wishing to be left alone. When they were needed again, he summoned them with shouts, starting right at dawn, when he desired his morning tea, and then a little later when he was ready for his bath, which required elaborate arrangements to be made by the family, who were, after all, willing to do quite a bit of work in this regard, for they had always been a clean family. Bucketfuls of hot water were raised to Sampath via a rope levering system designed especially for this purpose by his father.

When it came to his meals, Pinky's efforts in climbing up with bowls and dishes had ended more often in accidents than in success, with Sampath's dinner either in the grass or, worse, splattered and scalding over the poor bearer of food.

"This is absurd," said Mr. Chawla. "This isn't working." And he attached an old wooden crate to the elementary pulley system used to deliver Sampath's bathwater, and thereafter Sampath's meals were given to him simply by pulling on a rope and raising the crate. As the fluffy chapatis and puris⁷ were made down below they were

proffered up to him speared atop a bamboo stick, as were slices of pickle, bits of fruit, and other tasty tidbits.

Thus ensconced in his orchard bower, Sampath gave what came to be known as the Sermon in the Guava Tree, in which he responded to people's queries with such a mysterious charm and wit that they arrived in growing numbers to see him, making their way down the narrow path to stare with amazement at this skinny, long-legged apparition amid the leaves.

Among the first to make this trip were Miss Jyotsna and Mr. Gupta, his two colleagues from the post office.

"He must have gone through a thorough and complete transformation," said Miss Jyotsna. "Look how his face is being so different now."

Certainly it was a happier, calmer face. "*Namasteji*,"⁸ said Sampath, greeting them cheerfully from his cot in the tree, his new position of power. Really, he thought, he was quite fond of them. They had always meant well, unlike many others he could name.

"Hello, Sampath," said Mr. Gupta. "Why did you not take me with you? I could have had a little rest from this one here." He pointed at Miss Jyotsna with a comic expression on his face.

"Any time you want a rest from her you should send her to the sari and shalwar kameez⁹ shop," said Sampath, laughing. "You know how much this lady is loving clothes. . . . Oh, but maybe that is not such a good idea. Already she owes the Ladies' Fashion Shop a hundred and fifty-two rupees and eighty paise."¹

Once when Miss Jyotsna had been summoned to the office of the head of the post office, Sampath had had the occasion to examine the contents of her purse: the lipstick and comb, the embroidered handkerchief, the receipts and safety pins, the toffees and little vials of homeopathic medicine.

Miss Jyotsna raised a trembling hand to her mouth. The blood rushed to her face. She had kept her debt to the sari shop a strict secret. What else could Sampath say about her? She had heard of

the way he had stunned the devotees of the Krishna temple with his clairvoyance; now he had used his powers to examine her.

She nudged Mr. Gupta with her elbow. "Treat him with some respect," she said, surprising him with the strange new note of reverence in her voice. She was apparently awestruck by what she saw. And even the paan-shop² man, who had also come to visit, thinking that maybe he would sell a few paans while satisfying his curiosity, turned to give Mr. Gupta a dirty look, and said, "Clearly this fellow here is unversed in spiritual matters."

"But it is only Sampath," protested Mr. Gupta.

But clearly it was not only Sampath. It was Sampath of unfathomable wisdom, sitting in his tree abode.

The sweetshop man joined them after work, then two college students skipping a lecture, the washerman on his bicycle, and a pregnant lady who wished to know if her baby would be a boy or a girl. "Ah, yes," she said with satisfaction, to those standing about the tree with her, "he has the same expression as the Tajewala sage in samadhi."³ Perhaps you have seen the photographs?"

"My son is keeping bad company," interrupted a distressed but spirited relative of Lakshmiji's who was dressed in a canary-yellow sari. "What is there to do?" she asked.

"Add lemons to milk and it will grow sour," answered Sampath in an exceptionally sociable and happy temper, mimicking the old men of Shahkot, who liked to sit at their gates on winter afternoons, basking in their socks and hats, while they lectured passersby. "But add some sugar, Madam, and wah! how good that milk will taste. These are things I do not have to tell you. You yourself know you behaved just like your son when you were young."

He impressed himself by how many details he had stowed away while reading in the post office. Why, he could just pull them out of some secret compartment in his brain the way a magician pulled rabbits from a hat. How admiringly the people below the tree were looking at him! Never before had he felt the sweet and unique pleasure of giving advice which now suffused his being and spread to shine about his face.

"By this, do you mean I should remove him from the presence of these undesirable characters?" Lakshmi's relative asked.

"If you put a chicken on the fire and leave it, in a little while it will be no longer a chicken but ash and bones. Leave a kettle on the flames, the water will grow hot, and then, if someone does not lift it off, it will all boil away until there is nothing left. If your child is playing with a dead smelly mouse, you will not debate, 'Should I let him be, should I let him play.' No, straightaway you will throw away the mouse and take your child indoors to wash his hands."

Mr. Chawla and Pinky, who had just arrived from a trip to the market in time to hear this last sentence, looked at each other in disbelief when they saw how closely people listened to Sampath.

"Did you hear?" Mr. Chawla asked Pinky.

"Dead smelly mouse?" said Pinky, incredulous.

"If you do not weed," said Sampath, "your tomato plant will not flower."

Sampath's grandmother and Mrs. Chawla, flushed with pride, were already part of the crowd. They listened to every word that was being uttered, leaning forward to hear a round-faced man ask, "I am being overtaken by spiritual matters. How can I keep my mind on my responsibilities?"

"If you talk to a young girl as she stands before the mirror, it is like talking to a deaf person. And can you keep a moth from flying into the lantern by saying she should worry about her three children?"

"But are you saying I should forgo my duties to my wife and children?"

"Once my uncle had a rooster, and an insect laid its eggs in the flesh of its rear end. It knew the young ones would have a warm place to live in and plenty to eat before they were old enough to leave."

"Which is the better way to realize God? The way of devotion or the way of knowledge?"

The questions came fast and furious.

"Some people can only digest fish cooked in a light curry. Others are of a sour disposition and should not eat pickled fish. In the South they enjoy fish cooked with coconut water. I myself have a preference for pomfret in a sauce of chili and tamarind thickened with gram flour."⁴

"Where can I begin my search? What is the starting point?"

"POST-OFFICE CLERK CLIMBS TREE," Mr. Chawla read to his astounded family a little later in the week when the news had reached the local news bureau and was deemed worthy of attention. "Fleeing tedious duties at the Shahkot Post Office, a clerk has been reported to have settled in a large guava tree. According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his childlike ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom."

There it was—a modest column introducing Sampath to the world, along with news of a scarcity of groundnut and an epidemic of tree frogs, and the rumor that Coca-Cola might soon be arriving in India.⁵

1997

Endnotes

- Note 1: Yogurt, or coagulated milk.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Capital of the state of Jharkand, in eastern India.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Town in the Bikaner district of the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan, on the border with Pakistan. "Ayurvedic": practicing a traditional Indian system of medicine.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: See the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by English novelist Jane Austen (1775–1817): "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Locker or cabinet made by a large Indian company headquartered in Mumbai.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: That is, in the highest-scoring group.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: A ball-shaped, fried Indian sweet.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Hindu temple dedicated to the god Krishna, often worshiped as a god of joy and fertility.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: As a suffix attached to a name, “-ji” shows respect in many languages of the Indian subcontinent.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Species of basil cultivated by Hindus as a sacred plant.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Exclamation of grief or frustration (Hindi and Punjabi).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Of the town in eastern India near Bangladesh, subject to very heavy rainfall and believed to be the wettest place on Earth. Mustard oil is widely used in northern India for many purposes.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Robbers.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: That is, like a quilted or knitted teapot cover.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Indian prince, chief, or noble.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Round, unleavened cakes, usually fried. “Chapatis”: unleavened bread.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Hello, or welcome (Hindi).[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Outfit of loose tunic and trousers.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: One Indian rupee is equal to 100 paise (singular paisa). In 1990, 17 rupees were worth about one U.S. dollar; thus, she owes about nine dollars.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Shop selling cigarettes and paan, a preparation of betel leaf, areca nut, and lime chewed as a stimulant.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Highest state of meditation. “Tajewala”: site of a dam on the Yamuna River in northern India.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Flour made from ground chickpeas. “Pomfret”: a type of fish. “Tamarind”: sweet, acidic fruit.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: The Coca-Cola Company was forced out of India in 1977 after it refused to reveal its secret formula to the government; it was permitted to return in 1993. "Groundnut": peanut. [Return to reference 5](#)

ZADIE SMITH

b. 1975

The London-born daughter of an English father and a Jamaican mother, Zadie Smith was a product of the great postwar demographic change in Britain, the influx of Black and Asian immigrants from the empire's former colonies. Her mother had grown up in Jamaica and, like many other West Indians, settled in Britain in the 1960s. Of her mixed heritage Smith has written, "When your personal multiplicity is printed on your face, in an almost too obviously thematic manner, in your DNA, in your hair and in the neither-this-nor-that beige of your skin—well, anyone can see you come from Dream City," her tongue-in-cheek name for the space of hybridity. "It is a place of many voices, where the unified singular self is an illusion," where "everything is doubled, everything is various. You have no choice but to cross borders and speak in tongues." Springing from the experience of "personal multiplicity," Smith's fiction has vigorously crossed borders and spoken in a cacophony of tongues.

Smith grew up in what she has called "the big, colorful, working-class sea" of the Willesden area of northwest London that figures in her fiction. When she was studying English literature at the "smaller, posher pond" (her words) of Cambridge University, where she earned her B.A. in 1997, her fiction had already attracted the interest of major publishers. The result was her prize-winning first novel, *White Teeth* (2000). Before its publication, no work had captured

with such humor and zest the multicultural jangle of different peoples, dialects, and styles in contemporary Britain. Less riotously comic, her second novel, *The Autograph Man* (2002), tracks the celebrity quest of a Chinese-Jewish Londoner named Alex-Li Tandem, mourning his father's death in a world made shallow by the commodification of culture, the arts, personality, and ethnicity. Her third novel, *On Beauty* (2005), shifts locales from London largely to the Boston environs, where Smith spent a year, and deliberately echoes English author E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910) in telling the story of two entangled families. *NW* (2012) returns to North West London but in a more experimental style reminiscent of the paratactic and fractured perspectives of high modernism, while *Swing Time* (2016) extends across London, New York, and West Africa as it explores the complicated friendship of two women who grew up in council housing in the neighborhood of Smith's youth. *The Fraud* (2023), set around a real-life trial in the nineteenth century, draws a multicultural cast of characters together to ask who gets the right to narrate and why some people are believed over others.

Smith became a celebrity after the publication of *White Teeth* and the literary face of millennial Britain. Her wisecracking humor and rapid-fire dialogue, mimicry of an array of finely distinguished dialects and accents, and vibrant characterization of people from London's South Asian, Black, and other communities offer a portrait of London finally at home with its diversity. The focus of *White Teeth* is less on intercultural strife than on fluid—if often bumpy—relationships across ethnic divisions. Smith has always presented a multiracial Britain as a given rather than a novelty, but after 2010 her focus shifted more explicitly to matters of class, income inequality, gentrification, and, in the aftermath of the vote to withdraw from the European Union (Brexit), British isolationism. The epigraph to *NW* is from a sermon by Lollard priest John Ball given during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. While writing the novel, Smith also published a series of essays in defense of the welfare state, which despite being slowly and systematically dismantled during the

Thatcher years, provided the young Smith with essential support. Smith writes: "Some people owe everything they have to the bank accounts of their parents. I owe the state. Put simply, the state educated me, fixed my leg when it was broken, and gave me a grant that enabled me to go to university. It fixed my teeth (a bit) and found housing for my veteran father in his dotage. . . . To steal another writer's title: England made me."

In "The Embassy of Cambodia" (2013), presented here, the England that enabled Smith's upward mobility is disappearing under rising rents and the replacement of public programs with private facilities, such as the health club, which offers limited guest passes to members. The protagonist Fatou is a migrant from the Ivory Coast working under exploitative conditions in a wealthy household. The unnamed narrator claims to speak for "the people of Willesden," and the story presents a meditation on the ability of neighborhood locals to sympathize with those who have experienced adversity and atrocity in faraway countries (Cambodia and Rwanda were both sites of genocide). The story is punctuated by the "pock, smash" of a shuttlecock and organized by the increasingly lopsided score of a badminton match that Fatou hears but never sees. With her characteristic irony and wit, Smith captures, in the form of a game, a world divided into haves and have nots.

The Embassy of Cambodia

O—I¹

Who would expect the Embassy of Cambodia?² Nobody. Nobody could have expected it, or be expecting it. It's a surprise, to us all. The Embassy of Cambodia!

Next door to the embassy is a health centre. On the other side, a row of private residences, most of them belonging to wealthy Arabs (or so we, the people of Willesden,³ contend). They tend to have Corinthian pillars⁴ on either side of their front doors, and—it's widely believed—swimming pools out the back. The embassy, by contrast, is not very grand. It is only a four- or five-bedroom north London suburban villa, built at some point in the 1930s, surrounded by a red-brick wall, about eight feet high. And back and forth, cresting this wall horizontally, flies a shuttlecock. They are playing badminton in the Embassy of Cambodia. Pock, smash. Pock, smash.

The only real sign that the embassy is an embassy at all is the little brass plaque on the door (which reads: 'THE EMBASSY OF CAMBODIA') and the national flag of Cambodia (we assume that's what it is—what else could it be?) flying from the red-tiled roof. Some say, 'Oh, but it has a high wall around it, and this is what signifies that it is not a private residence, like the other houses on the street, but rather an embassy.' The people who say so are foolish. Many of the private houses have high walls, quite as high as the Embassy of Cambodia—but they are not embassies.

O—2

On 6 August, Fatou walked past the embassy for the first time, on her way to a swimming pool. It is a large pool, although not quite Olympic size. To swim a mile you must complete eighty-two lengths, which, in its very tedium, often feels as much a mental exercise as a

physical one. The water is kept unusually warm, to please the majority of people who patronize the health centre, the kind who come not so much to swim as to lounge poolside or rest their bodies in the sauna. Fatou has swum here five or six times now, and she is often the youngest person in the pool by several decades. Generally, the clientele are white, or else South Asian or from the Middle East, but now and then Fatou finds herself in the water with fellow Africans. When she spots these big men, paddling frantically like babies, struggling simply to stay afloat, she prides herself on her own abilities, having taught herself to swim, several years earlier, at the Carib Beach Resort, in Accra.⁵ Not in the hotel pool—no employees were allowed in the pool. No, she learned by struggling through the rough grey sea, on the other side of the resort walls. Rising and sinking, rising and sinking, on the dirty foam. No tourist ever stepped on to the beach (it was covered with trash), much less into the cold and treacherous sea. Nor did any of the other chambermaids. Only some reckless teenage boys, late at night, and Fatou, early in the morning. There is almost no way to compare swimming at Carib Beach and swimming in the health centre, warm as it is, tranquil as a bath. And, as Fatou passes the Embassy of Cambodia, on her way to the pool, over the high wall she sees a shuttlecock, passed back and forth between two unseen players. The shuttlecock floats in a wide arc softly rightwards, and is smashed back, and this happens again and again, the first player always somehow able to retrieve the smash and transform it, once more, into a gentle, floating arc. High above, the sun tries to force its way through a cloud ceiling, grey and filled with water. Pock, smash. Pock, smash.

O-3

When the Embassy of Cambodia first appeared in our midst, a few years ago, some of us said, 'Well, if we were poets perhaps we could have written some sort of an ode about this surprising appearance of the embassy.' (For embassies are usually to be found in the centre of the city. This was the first one we had seen in the suburbs.) But

we are not really a poetic people. We are from Willesden. Our minds tend towards the prosaic. I doubt there is a man or woman among us, for example, who—upon passing the Embassy of Cambodia for the first time—did not immediately think: ‘genocide’.⁶

O-4

Pock, smash. Pock, smash. This summer we watched the Olympics, becoming well attuned to grunting, and to the many other human sounds associated with effort and the triumph of the will. But the players in the garden of the Embassy of Cambodia are silent. (We can’t say for sure that it is a garden—we have a limited view over the wall. It may well be a paved area, reserved for badminton.) The only sign that a game of badminton is under way at all is the motion of the shuttlecock itself, alternately being lobbed and smashed, lobbed and smashed, and always at the hour that Fatou passes on her way to the health centre to swim (just after ten in the morning on Mondays). It should be explained that it is Fatou’s employers—and not Fatou—who are the true members of this health club; they have no idea she uses their guest passes in this way. (Mr and Mrs Derawal and their three children—aged seventeen, fifteen and ten—live on the same street as the embassy, but the road is almost a mile long, with the embassy at one end and the Derawals at the other.) Fatou’s deception is possible only because on Mondays Mr Derawal drives to Eltham⁷ to visit his mini-market there, and Mrs Derawal works the counter in the family’s second mini-mart, in Kensal Rise.⁸ In the slim drawer of a faux-Louis XVI console,⁹ in the entrance hall of the Derawals’ primary residence, one can find a stockpile of guest passes. Nobody besides Fatou seems to remember that they are there.

Since 6 August (the first occasion on which she noticed the badminton), Fatou has made a point of pausing by the bus stop opposite the embassy for five or ten minutes before she goes in to swim, idle minutes she can hardly afford (Mrs Derawal returns to the house at lunchtime) and yet seems unable to forgo. Such is the

strangely compelling aura of the embassy. Usually, Fatou gains nothing from this waiting and observing, but on a few occasions she has seen people arrive at the embassy and watched as they are buzzed through the gate. Young white people carrying rucksacks.¹ Often they are scruffy, and wearing sandals, despite the cool weather. None of the visitors so far have been visibly Cambodian. These young people are likely looking for visas. They are buzzed in and then pass through the gate, although Fatou would really have to stand on top of the bus stop to get a view of whoever it is that lets them in. What she can say with certainty is that these occasional arrivals have absolutely no effect on the badminton, which continues in its steady pattern, first gentle, then fast, first soft and high, then hard and low.

O-5

On 20 August, long after the Olympians had returned to their respective countries, Fatou noticed that a basketball hoop had appeared in the far corner of the garden, its net of synthetic white rope rising high enough to be seen over the wall. But no basketball was ever played—at least not when Fatou was passing. The following week it had been moved closer to Fatou's side of the wall. (It must be a mobile hoop, on casters.) Fatou waited a week, two weeks, but still no basketball game replaced the badminton, which carried on as before.

O-6

When I say that we were surprised by the appearance of the Embassy of Cambodia, I don't mean to suggest that the embassy is in any way unique in its peculiarity. In fact, this long, wide street is notable for a number of curious buildings, in the context of which the Embassy of Cambodia does not seem especially strange. There is a mansion called GARYLAND, with something else in Arabic engraved below GARYLAND, and both the English and the Arabic text are inlaid in pink-and-green marble pillars that bookend a gigantic fence,

far higher than the embassy's, better suited to a fortress. Dramatic golden gates open automatically to let vehicles in and out. At any one time, GARYLAND has five to seven cars parked in its driveway.

There is a house with a huge pink elephant on the doorstep, apparently made of mosaic tiles.

There is a Catholic nunnery with a single red Ford Focus parked in front. There is a Sikh institute. There is a faux-Tudor² house with a pool that Mickey Rooney³ rented for a season, while he was performing in the West End fifteen summers ago. That house sits opposite a dingy retirement home, where one sometimes sees distressed souls, barely covered by their dressing gowns, standing on their tiny balconies, staring into the tops of the chestnut trees.

So we are hardly strangers to curious buildings, here in Willesden and Brondesbury.⁴ And yet still we find the Embassy of Cambodia a little surprising. It is not the right sort of surprise, somehow.

O-7

In a discarded *Metro*⁵ found on the floor of the Derawal kitchen, Fatou read with interest a story about a Sudanese⁶ 'slave' living in a rich man's house in London. It was not the first time that Fatou had wondered if she herself was a slave, but this story, brief as it was, confirmed in her own mind that she was not. After all, it was her father, and not a kidnapper, who had taken her from Ivory Coast⁷ to Ghana, and when they reached Accra they had both found employment in the same hotel. Two years later, when she was eighteen, it was her father again who had organized her difficult passage to Libya⁸ and then on to Italy⁹—a not insignificant financial sacrifice on his part. Also, Fatou could read English—and speak a little Italian—and this girl in the paper could not read or speak anything except the language of her tribe. And nobody beat Fatou, although Mrs Derawal had twice slapped her in the face, and the two older children spoke to her with no respect at all and thanked her for nothing. (Sometimes she heard her name used as a term of abuse between them. 'You're as black as Fatou.' Or 'You're as stupid as

Fatou.’) On the other hand, just like the girl in the newspaper, she had not seen her passport with her own eyes since she arrived at the Derawals’, and she had been told from the start that her wages were to be retained by the Derawals to pay for the food and water and heat she would require during her stay, as well as to cover the rent for the room she slept in. In the final analysis, however, Fatou was not confined to the house. She had an Oyster Card,¹ given to her by the Derawals, and was trusted to do the food shopping and other outside tasks, for which she was given cash and told to return with change and receipts for everything. If she did not go out in the evenings that was only because she had no money with which to go out, and anyway knew very few people in London. Whereas the girl in the paper was not allowed to leave her employers’ premises, not ever—she was a prisoner.

On Sunday mornings, for example, Fatou regularly left the house, to meet her church friend Andrew Okonkwo at the 98 bus stop and go with him to worship at the Sacred Heart of Jesus, just off the Kilburn High Road. Afterwards Andrew always took her to a Tunisian² café, where they had coffee and cake, which Andrew, who worked as a night guard in the City, always paid for. And on Mondays Fatou swam. In very warm water, and thankful for the semi-darkness in which the health club, for some reason, kept its clientele, as if the place were a nightclub, or a midnight Mass. The darkness helped disguise the fact that her swimming costume was in fact a sturdy black bra and a pair of plain black cotton knickers. No, on balance she did not think she was a slave.

O—8

The woman exiting the Embassy of Cambodia did not look especially like a New Person or an Old Person³—neither clearly of the city nor the country—and of course it is a long time since this division meant anything in Cambodia. Nor did these terms mean anything to Fatou, who was curious only to catch her first sighting of a possible Cambodian anywhere near the Embassy of Cambodia. She was

particularly interested in the woman's clothes, which were precise and utilitarian—a grey shirt tucked tightly into a pair of tan slacks, a blue mackintosh,⁴ a droopy rain hat—just as if she were a man, or no different from a man. Her straight black hair was cut short. She had in her hands many bags from Sainsbury's,⁵ and this Fatou found a little mysterious: where was she taking all that shopping? It also surprised her that the woman from the Embassy of Cambodia should shop in the same Willesden branch of Sainsbury's where Fatou shopped for the Derawals. She had an idea that Oriental people had their own, secret establishments and shopped there. (She believed the Jews did, too.) She both admired and slightly resented this self-reliance, but had no doubt that it was the secret to holding great power, as a people. For example, when the Chinese had come to Fatou's village to take over the mine, an abiding local mystery had been: what did they eat and where did they eat it? They certainly did not buy food in the market, or from the Lebanese⁶ traders along the main road. They made their own arrangements. (Whether back home or here, the key to surviving as a people, in Fatou's opinion, was to make your own arrangements.)

But, looking again at the bags the Cambodian woman carried, Fatou wondered whether they weren't in fact very old bags—hadn't their design changed? The more she looked at them the more convinced she became that they contained not food but clothes or something else again, the outline of each bag being a little too rounded and smooth. Maybe she was simply taking out the rubbish. Fatou stood at the bus stop and watched until the Cambodian woman reached the corner, crossed and turned left towards the high road. Meanwhile, back at the embassy the badminton continued to be played, though with a little more effort now because of a wayward wind. At one point it seemed to Fatou that the next lob would blow southwards, sending the shuttlecock over the wall to land lightly in her own hands. Instead the other player, with his vicious reliability (Fatou had long ago decided that both players were men), caught the shuttlecock as it began to drift and sent it back to his opponent—another deathly, downward smash.

O—9

No doubt there are those who will be critical of the narrow, essentially local scope of Fatou's interest in the Cambodian woman from the Embassy of Cambodia, but we, the people of Willesden, have some sympathy with her attitude. The fact is if we followed the history of every little country in this world—in its dramatic as well as its quiet times—we would have no space left in which to live our own lives or to apply ourselves to our necessary tasks, never mind indulge in occasional pleasures, like swimming. Surely there is something to be said for drawing a circle around our attention and remaining within that circle. But how large should this circle be?

O—10

It was the Sunday after Fatou saw the Cambodian that she decided to put a version of this question to Andrew, as they sat in the Tunisian café eating two large fingers of dough stuffed with cream and custard and topped with a strip of chocolate icing. Specifically, she began a conversation with Andrew about the Holocaust,⁷ as Andrew was the only person she had found in London with whom she could have these deep conversations, partly because he was patient and sympathetic to her, but also because he was an educated person, presently studying for a part-time business degree at the College of North West London. With his student card he had been given free, twenty-four-hour access to the Internet.

'But more people died in Rwanda,'⁸ Fatou argued. 'And nobody speaks about that! Nobody!'

'Yes, I think that's true,' Andrew conceded, and put the first of four sugars in his coffee. 'I have to check. But, yes, millions and millions. They hide the true numbers, but you can see them online. There's always a lot of hiding; it's the same all over. It's like this bureaucratic Nigerian⁹ government—they are the greatest at numerology, hiding figures, changing them to suit their purposes. I have a name for it: I call it "demonology". Not "numerology"—"demonology".'

'Yes, but what I am saying is like this,' Fatou pressed, wary of the conversation's drifting back, as it usually did, to the financial corruption of the Nigerian government. 'Are we born to suffer? Sometimes I think we were born to suffer more than all the rest.'

Andrew pushed his professorial glasses up his nose. 'But, Fatou, you're forgetting the most important thing. Who cried most for Jesus? His mother. Who cries most for you? Your father. It's very logical, when you break it down. The Jews cry for the Jews. The Russians cry for the Russians. We cry for Africa, because we are Africans, and, even then, I'm sorry, Fatou'—Andrew's chubby face creased up in a smile—'if Nigeria plays Ivory Coast and we beat you into the ground, I'm laughing, man! I can't lie. I'm celebrating. Stomp! Stomp!'

He did a little dance with his upper body, and Fatou tried, not for the first time, to imagine what he might be like as a husband, but could see only herself as the wife, and Andrew as a teenage son of hers, bright and helpful, to be sure, but a son all the same—though in reality he was three years older than she. Surely it was wrong to find his baby fat and struggling moustache so off-putting. Here was a good man! She knew that he cared for her, was clean and had given his life to Christ. Still, some part of her rebelled against him, some unholy part.

'Hush your mouth,' she said; trying to sound more playful than disgusted, and was relieved when he stopped jiggling and laid both his hands on the table, his face suddenly quite solemn.

'Believe me, that's a natural law, Fatou, pure and simple. Only God cries for us all, because we are *all* his children. It's very, very logical. You just have to think about it for a moment.'

Fatou sighed, and spooned some coffee foam into her mouth. 'But I still think we have more pain. I've seen it myself. Chinese people have never been slaves. They are always protected from the worst.'

Andrew took off his glasses and rubbed them on the end of his shirt. Fatou could tell that he was preparing to lay knowledge upon her.

'Fatou, think about it for a moment, please: what about Hiroshima?'¹

It was a name Fatou had heard before, but sometimes Andrew's superior knowledge made her nervous. She would find herself struggling to remember even the things she had believed she already knew.

'The big wave . . .' she began, uncertainly—it was the wrong answer. He laughed mightily and shook his head at her.

'No, man! Big bomb. Biggest bomb in the world, made by the USA, of course. They killed five million people in *one second*. Can you imagine that? You think just because your eyes are like this'—he tugged the skin at both temples—'you're always protected? Think again. This bomb, even if it didn't blow you up, a week later it melted the skin off your bones.'

Fatou realized she had heard this story before, or some version of it. But she felt the same vague impatience with it as she did with all accounts of suffering in the distant past. For what could be done about the suffering of the distant past?

'OK,' she said. 'Maybe all people have their hard times, in the past of history, but I still say—'

'Here is a counterpoint,' Andrew said, reaching out and gripping her shoulder. 'Let me ask you, Fatou, seriously, think about this. I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I have thought a lot about this and I want to pass it on to you, because I know you care about things seriously, not like these people—' He waved a hand at the assortment of cake eaters at other tables. 'You're not like the other girls I know, just thinking about the club and their hair. you're a person who thinks. I told you before, anything you want to know about, ask me—I'll look it up, I'll do the research. I have access. Then I'll bring it to you.'

'You're a very good friend to me, Andrew, I know that.'

'Listen, we are friends to each other. In this world you need friends. But, Fatou, listen to my question. It's a counterpoint to what you have been saying. Tell me, why would God choose us especially for suffering when we, above all others, praise his name? Africa is

the fastest-growing Christian continent! Just think about it for a minute! It doesn't even make sense!'

'But it's not him,' Fatou said quietly, looking over Andrew's shoulder to the rain beating on the window. 'It's the Devil.'

O-11

Andrew and Fatou sat in the Tunisian coffee shop, waiting for it to stop raining, but it did not stop raining and at three p.m. Fatou said she would just have to get wet. She shared Andrew's umbrella as far as the Overground,² letting him pull her into his clammy, high-smelling body as they walked. At Brondesbury station Andrew had to get the train, and so they said goodbye. Several times he tried to press his umbrella on her, but Fatou knew the walk from Acton Central to Andrew's bedsit was long and she refused to let him suffer on her account.

'Big woman. Won't let anybody protect you.'

'Rain doesn't scare me.'

Fatou took from her pocket a swimming cap she had found on the floor of the health club changing room. She wound her plaits into a bun and pulled the cap over her head.

'That's a very original idea,' Andrew said, laughing. 'You should market that! Make your first million!'

'Peace be with you,' Fatou said, and kissed him chastely on the cheek.

Andrew did the same, lingering a little longer with his kiss than was necessary.

O-12

By the time Fatou reached the Derawals' only her hair was dry, but before going to get changed she rushed to the kitchen to take the lamb out of the freezer, though it was pointless—there were not enough hours before dinner—and then upstairs to collect the dirty clothes from the matching wicker baskets in four different bedrooms.

There was no one in the master bedroom, or in Faizul's or Julie's. Downstairs a television was blaring. Entering Asma's room, hearing nothing, assuming it empty, Fatou headed straight for the laundry basket in the corner. As she opened the lid she felt a hand hit her hard on the back: she turned around.

There was the youngest, Asma, in front of her, her mouth open like a trout fish. Before Fatou could understand, Asma punched the huge pile of clothes out of her hands. Fatou stooped to retrieve them. While she was kneeling on the floor, another strike came, a kick to her arm. She left the clothes where they were and got up, frightened by her own anger. But when she looked at Asma now she saw the girl gesturing frantically at her own throat, then putting her hands together in prayer and then back to her throat once more. Her eyes were bulging. She veered suddenly to the right; she threw herself over the back of a chair. When she turned back to Fatou her face was grey and Fatou understood finally and ran to her, grabbed her round her waist and pulled upwards as she had been taught in the hotel. A marble—with an iridescent ribbon of blue at its centre, like a wave—flew from the child's mouth and landed wetly in the carpet's plush.

Asma wept and drew in frantic gulps of air. Fatou gave her a hug, and worried when the clothes would get done. Together they went down to the den, where the rest of the family was watching *Britain's Got Talent*³ on a flat-screen TV attached to the wall. Everybody stood at the sight of Asma's wild weeping. Mr Derawal paused the Sky⁴ box. Fatou explained about the marble.

'How many times I tell you not to put things in your mouth?' Mr Derawal asked, and Mrs Derawal said something in their language—Fatou heard the name of their God—and pulled Asma on to the sofa and stroked her daughter's silky black hair.

'I couldn't breathe, man! I couldn't call nobody,' Asma cried. 'I was gonna die!'

'What you putting marbles in your mouth for anyway, you idiot?' Faizul said, and unpaused the Sky box. 'What kind of chief puts a marble in her mouth? Idiot. Bet you was bricking it.'⁵

'Oi, she saved your life,' said Julie, the eldest child, whom Fatou generally liked the least. 'Fatou saved your life. That's deep.'

'I woulda just done this,' Faizul said, and performed an especially dramatic Heimlich to his own skinny body. 'And if that didn't work I woulda just start pounding myself karate style, bam bam bam bam bam—'

'Faizul!' Mr Derawal shouted, and then turned stiffly to Fatou, and spoke not to her, exactly, but to a point somewhere between her elbow and the sunburst mirror behind her head. 'Thank you, Fatou. It's lucky you were there.'

Fatou nodded and went to leave, but at the doorway to the den Mrs Derawal asked her if the lamb had defrosted and Fatou had to confess that she had only just taken it out. Mrs Derawal said something sharply in her language. Fatou waited for something further, but Mr Derawal only smiled awkwardly at her, and nodded as a sign that she could go now. Fatou went upstairs to collect the clothes.

O-13

'To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss' was one of the mottoes of the Khmer Rouge. It referred to the New People, those city dwellers who could not be made to give up city life and work on a farm. By returning everybody back to the land, the regime hoped to create a society of Old People—that is to say, of agrarian peasants. When a New Person was relocated from the city to the country, it was vital not to show weakness in the fields. Vulnerability was punishable by death.

In Willesden, we are almost all New People, though some of us, like Fatou, were, until quite recently, Old People, working the land in our various countries of origin. Of the Old and New People of Willesden I speak; I have been chosen to speak for them, though they did not choose me and must wonder what gives me the right. I could say, 'Because I was born at the crossroads of Willesden, Kilburn and Queen's Park!' But the reply would be swift and damning: 'Oh, don't be foolish, many people were born right there;

it doesn't mean anything at all. We are not one people and no one can speak for us. It's all a lot of nonsense. We see you standing on the balcony, overlooking the Embassy of Cambodia, in your dressing gown, staring into the chestnut trees, looking gormless.⁶ The real reason you speak in this way is because you can't think of anything better to do.'

O-14

On Monday, Fatou went swimming. She paused to watch the badminton. She thought that the arm that delivered the smashes must make a movement similar to the one she made in the pool, with her clumsy yet effective front crawl. She entered the health centre and gave a guest pass to the girl behind the desk. In the dimly lit changing room, she put on her sturdy black underwear. As she swam, she thought of Carib Beach. Her father serving snapper to the guests on the deck, his bow tie always a little askew, the ugly tourists, the whole scene there. Of course, it was not surprising in the least to see old white men from Germany with beautiful local girls on their laps, but she would never forget the two old white women from England—red women, really, thanks to the sun—each of them as big as two women put together, with Kweku and Osai lying by their sides, the boys hooking their scrawny black bird-arms round the women's massive red shoulders, and dancing with them in the hotel 'ballroom', answering to the names Michael and David, and disappearing into the women's cabins at night. She had known the boys' real girlfriends; they were chambermaids like Fatou. Sometimes they cleaned the rooms where Kweku and Osai spent the night with the English women. And the girls themselves had 'boyfriends' among the guests. It was not a holy place, that hotel. And the pool was shaped like a kidney bean: nobody could really swim in it, or showed any sign of wanting to. Mostly, they stood in it and drank cocktails. Sometimes they even had their burgers delivered to the pool. Fatou hated to watch her father crouching to hand a burger to a man waist-high in water.

The only good thing that happened in Carib Beach was this: once a month, on a Sunday, the congregation of a local church poured out of a coach at the front gates, lined up fully dressed in the courtyard and then walked into the pool for a mass baptism. The tourists were never warned, and Fatou never understood why the congregants were allowed to do it. But she loved to watch their white shirts bloat and spread across the surface of the water, and to hear the weeping and singing. At the time—though she was not then a member of that church, or of any church except the one in her heart—she had felt that this baptism was for her, too, and that it kept her safe, and that this was somehow the reason she did not become one of the ‘girls’ at the Carib Beach Resort. In almost two years—between her father’s efforts and the grace of an unseen and unacknowledged God—she did her work, and swam Sunday mornings at the crack of dawn, and got along all right. But the Devil was waiting.

She had only a month left in Accra when she entered a bedroom to clean it one morning and heard the door shut softly behind her before she could put a hand to it. He came, this time, in Russian form. Afterwards, he cried and begged her not to tell anyone: his wife had gone to see the Cape Coast Castle⁷ and they were leaving the following morning. Fatou listened to his blubbing and realized that he thought the hotel would punish him for his action, or that the police would be called. That was when she knew that the Devil was stupid as well as evil. She spat in his face and left. Thinking about the Devil now made her swimming fast and angry, and for a while she easily lapped the young white man in the lane next to hers, the faster lane.

O—15

‘Don’t give the Devil your anger, it is his food,’ Andrew said to her, when they first met, a year ago. He handed her a leaflet as she sat eating a sandwich on a bench in Kilburn Park. ‘Don’t make it so easy for him.’ Without being invited, he took the seat next to hers and began going through the text of his leaflet. It was printed to look like a newspaper, and he started with the headline: ‘WHY IS THERE

PAIN?’ She liked him. They began a theological conversation. It continued in the Tunisian café, and every Sunday for several months. A lot of the things he said she had heard before from other people, and they did not succeed in changing her attitude. In the end, it was one thing that he said to her that really made the difference. It was after she’d told him this story:

‘One day, at the hotel, I heard a commotion on the beach. It was early morning. I went out and I saw nine children washed up dead on the beach. Ten or eleven years old, boys and girls. They had gone into the water, but they didn’t know how to swim. Some people were crying, maybe two people. Everyone else just shook their heads and carried on walking to where they were going. After a long time, the police came. The bodies were taken away. People said, “Well, they are with God now.” Everybody carried on like before. I went back to work. The next year I was in Rome. I saw a boy who was about fifteen years old knocked down on his bike. He was dead. People were screaming and crying in the street. Everybody crying. They were not his family. They were only strangers. The next day, it was in the paper.’

And Andrew replied, ‘A tap runs fast the first time you switch it on.’

O—16

Twenty more laps. Fatou tried to think of the last time she had cried. It was in Rome, but it wasn’t for the boy on the bike. She was cleaning toilets in a Catholic girls’ school. She did not know Jesus then, so it made no difference what kind of school it was—she only knew she was cleaning toilets. At midday, she had a fifteen-minute break. She would go to the little walled garden across the road to smoke a cigarette. One day, she was sitting on a bench near a fountain and spotted something odd in the bushes. A tin of green paint. A gold spray can. A Statue of Liberty costume. An identity card with the name Rajib Devanga. One shoe. An empty wallet. A plastic tub with a slit cut in the top meant for coins and euro notes—empty. A little stain of what looked like blood on this tub. Until that point,

she had been envious of the Bengali boys on Via Nazionale.⁸ She felt that she, too, could paint herself green and stand still for an hour. But when she tried to find out more the Bengalis would not talk to her. It was a closed shop, for brown men only. Her place was in the toilet stalls. She thought those men had it easy. Then she saw that little sad pile of belongings in the bush and cried; for herself or for Rajib, she wasn't sure.

Now she turned on to her back in the water for the final two laps, relaxed her arms and kicked her feet out like a frog. Water made her think of more water. 'When you're baptized in our church, all sin is wiped, you start again': Andrew's promise. She had never told Andrew of the sin precisely, but she knew that he knew she was not a virgin. The day she finally became a Catholic, 6 February 2011, Andrew had taken her, hair still wet, to the Tunisian café and asked her how it felt.

She was joyful! She said, 'I feel like a new person!'

But happiness like that is hard to hold on to. Back at work the next day, picking Julie's dirty underwear up off the floor inches from the wicker basket, she had to keep reminding herself of her new relationship with Jesus and how it changed everything. Didn't it change everything? The following Sunday she expressed some of her doubt, cautiously, to Andrew.

'But did you think you'd never feel sad again? Never angry or tired or just pissed off—sorry about my language. Come on, Fatou! Wise up, man!'

Was it wrong to hope to be happy?

O—17

Lost to these watery thoughts, Fatou got home a little later than usual and was through the door only minutes before Mrs Derawal.

'How is Asma?' Fatou asked. She had heard the girl cry out in the night.

'My goodness, it was just a little marble,' Mrs Derawal said, and Fatou realized that it was not in her imagination: since Sunday night,

neither of the adult Derawals had been able to look her in the eye. 'What a fuss everybody is making. I have a list for you—it's on the table.'

O-18

Fatou watched Andrew pick his way through the tables in the Tunisian café, holding a tray with a pair of mochas on it and some croissants. He hit the elbow of one man with his backside and then trailed the belt of his long, silly leather coat through the lunch of another, apologizing as he went. You could not say he was an elegant man. But he was generous, he was thoughtful. She stood up to push a teetering croissant back on to its plate. They sat down at the same time, and smiled at each other.

'A while ago you asked me about Cambodia,' Andrew said. 'Well, it's a very interesting case.' He tapped the frame of his glasses. 'If you even wore a pair of these? They would kill you. Glasses meant you thought too much. They had very primitive ideas. They were enemies of logic and progress. They wanted everybody to go back to the country and live like simple people.'

'But sometimes it's true that things are simpler in the country.'

'In some ways. I don't really know. I've never lived in the country.'

I don't really know. It was good to hear him say that! It was a good sign. She smiled cheekily at him. 'People are less sinful in the country,' she said, but he did not seem to see she was flirting with him, and began upon another lecture.

'That's true. But you can't force people to live in the country. That's what I call a Big Man Policy. I invented this phrase for my dissertation. We know all about Big Man Policies⁹ in Nigeria. They come from the top and they crush you. There's always somebody who wants to be the Big Man, and take everything for themselves, and tell everybody how to think and what to do. When, actually, it's he who is weak. But if the Big Men see that *you* see that *they* are

weak they have no choice but to destroy you. That is the real tragedy.'

Fatou sighed. 'I never met a man who didn't want to tell everybody how to think and what to do,' she said.

Andrew laughed. 'Fatou, you include me? Are you a feminist now, too?'

Fatou brought her mug up to her lips and looked penetratingly at Andrew. There were good and bad kinds of weakness in men, and she had come to the conclusion that the key was to know which kind you were dealing with.

'Andrew,' she said, putting her hand on his, 'would you like to come swimming with me?'

O-19

Because Fatou believed that the Derawals' neighbours had been instructed to spy on her, she would not let Andrew come to the house to pick her up on Monday, instead leaving as she always did, just before ten, carrying misleading Sainsbury's bags and walking towards the health centre. She spotted him from a long way off—the road was so straight and he had arrived early. He stood shivering in the drizzle. She felt sorry, but also a little prideful: it was the prospect of seeing her body that had raised this big man from his bed. Still, it was a sacrifice, she knew, for her friend to come out to meet her on a weekday morning. He worked all night long and kept the daytime for sleeping. She watched him waving at her from their agreed meeting spot, just on the corner, in front of the Embassy of Cambodia. After a while, he stopped waving—because she was still so far away—and then, a little later, he began waving again. She waved back, and when she finally reached him they surprised each other by holding hands. 'I'm an excellent badminton player,' Andrew said, as they passed the Embassy of Cambodia. 'I would make you weep for mercy! Next time, instead of swimming we should play badminton somewhere.' Next time, we should go to Paris. Next time, we should go to the moon. He was a dreamer. But there are worse things, Fatou thought, than being a dreamer.

'So you're a guest and this is your guest?' the girl behind the desk asked.

'I am a guest and this is another guest,' Fatou replied.

'Yeah . . . that's not really how it works?'

'Please,' Fatou said. 'We've come from a long way.'

'I appreciate that,' the girl said. 'But I really shouldn't let you in, to be honest.'

'Please,' Fatou said again. She could think of no other argument.

The girl took out a pen and made a mark on Fatou's guest pass.

'This one time. Don't tell no one I did this, please. One time only! I'll need to cross off two separate visits.'

For one time only, then, Andrew and Fatou approached the changing rooms together and parted at the doors that led to the men's and the women's. In her changing room, Fatou got ready with lightning speed. Yet somehow he was already there on a lounge when she came out, eyes trained on the women's changing-room door, waiting for her to emerge.

'Man, this is the life!' he said, putting his arms behind his head.

'Are you getting in?' Fatou asked, and tried to place her hands, casually, in front of her groin.

'Not yet, man, I'm just taking it all in, taking it all in. You go in. I'll come in a moment.'

Fatou climbed down the steps and began to swim. Not elegant, not especially fast, but consistent and determined. Every now and then she would angle her head to try to see if Andrew was still on his chair, smiling to himself. After twenty laps, she swam to where he lay and put her elbows on the tiles.

'You're not coming in? It's so warm. Like a bath.'

'Sure, sure,' he said. 'I'll try it.'

As he sat up his stomach folded in on itself, and Fatou wondered whether he had spent all that time on the lounge to avoid her seeing its precise bulk and wobble. He came towards the stairs;

Fatou held out a hand to him, but he pushed it away. He made his way down and stood in the shallow end, splashing water over his shoulders like a prince fanning himself, and then crouching down into it.

'It is warm! Very nice. This is the life, man! You go, swim—I'll follow you.'

Fatou kicked off, creating so much splash she heard someone in the adjacent lane complain. At the wall, she turned and looked for Andrew. His method, such as it was, involved dipping deep under the water and hanging there like a hippo, then batting his arms till he crested for air, and then diving down again and hanging. It was a lot of energy to expend on a short distance, and by the time he reached the wall he was panting like a maniac. His eyes—he had no goggles—were painfully red.

'It's OK,' Fatou said, trying to take his hand again. 'If you let me, I'll show you how.' But he shrugged her off and rubbed at his eyes.

'There's too much bloody chlorine in this pool.'

'You want to leave?'

Andrew turned back to look at Fatou. His eyes were streaming. He looked, to Fatou, like a little boy trying to disguise the fact he had been crying. But then he held her hand, under the water.

'No. I'm just going to take it easy right here.'

'OK,' Fatou said.

'You swim. You're good. You swim.'

'OK,' Fatou said, and set off, and she found that each lap was more distracted and rhythmless than the last. She was not used to being watched while she swam. Ten laps later, she suddenly stood up halfway down the lane and walked the rest of the distance to the wall.

'You want to go in the Jacuzzi?' she asked him, pointing to it.

In the hot tub sat a woman dressed in a soaking tracksuit, her head covered with a headscarf. A man next to the woman, perhaps her husband, stared at Fatou and said something to the woman. He was so hairy he was almost as covered as she was. Together they rose up out of the water and left. He was wearing the tiniest of

Speedos, the kind Fatou had feared Andrew might wear, and was grateful he had not. Andrew's shorts were perfectly nice, knee-length, red and solid, and looked good against his skin.

'No,' Andrew said. 'It's great just to be here with you, watching the world go by.'

O-21

That same evening, Fatou was fired. Not for the guest passes—the Derawals never found out how many miles Fatou had travelled on their membership. In fact, it was hard for Fatou to understand exactly why she was being fired, as Mrs Derawal herself did not seem able to explain it very precisely.

'What you don't understand is that we have no need for a nanny,' she said, standing in the doorway of Fatou's room—there was not really enough space in there for two people to stand without one of them being practically on the bed. 'The children are grown. We need a housekeeper, one who cleans properly. These days you care more about the children than the cleaning,' Mrs Derawal added, though Fatou had never cared for the children, not even slightly. 'And that is of no use to us.'

Fatou said nothing. She was thinking that she did not have a proper suitcase and would have to take her things from Mrs Derawal's house in plastic bags.

'And so you will want to find somewhere else to live as soon as possible,' Mrs Derawal said. 'My husband's cousin is coming to stay in this room on Friday—this Friday.'

Fatou thought about that for a moment. Then she said, 'Can I please use the phone for one call?'

Mrs Derawal inspected a piece of wood that had flaked from the doorframe. But she nodded.

'And I would like to have my passport, please.'

'Excuse me?'

'My passport, please.'

At last Mrs Derawal looked at Fatou, right into her eyes, but her face was twisted, as if Fatou had just reached over and slapped her. Anyone could see the Devil had climbed inside poor Mrs Derawal. He was lighting her up with a pure fury.

'For goodness' sake, girl, I don't have your passport! What would I want with your passport? It's probably in a drawer in the kitchen somewhere. Is that my job now, too, to look for your things?'

Fatou was left alone. She packed her things into the decoy shopping bags she usually took to the swimming pool. While she was doing this, someone pushed her passport under her door. An hour later she carried her bags downstairs and went directly to the phone in the hall. Faizul walked by and lifted his hand for a high-five. Fatou ignored him and dialled Andrew's number. From her friend's voice she knew that she had woken him, but he was not even the slightest bit angry. He listened to all she had to say and seemed to understand, too, without her having to say so, that at this moment she could not speak freely. After she had said her part, he asked a few quick technical questions and then explained clearly and carefully what was to happen.

'It will all be OK. They need cleaners in my offices—I will ask for you. In the meantime, you come here. We'll sleep in shifts. You can trust me. I respect you, Fatou.'

But she did not have her Oyster Card; it was in the kitchen, on the fridge under a magnet of Florida, and she would rather die than go in there. Fine: he could meet her at six p.m. at Brondesbury Overground station. Fatou looked at the grandfather clock in front of her: she had four hours to kill.

'Six o'clock,' she repeated. She put the phone down, took the rest of the guest passes from the drawer of the faux-Louis XVI console and left the house.

'Weighed down a bit today,' the girl at the desk of the health club said, nodding at Fatou's collection of plastic bags. Fatou held out a guest pass for a stamp and did not smile. 'See you next time,' this same girl said, an hour and a half later, as Fatou strode past, still weighed down and still unwilling to be grateful for past favours.

Gratitude was just another kind of servitude. Better to make your own arrangements.

Walking out into the cold grey, Fatou felt a sense of brightness, of being washed clean, that neither the weather nor her new circumstances could dim. Still, her limbs were weary and her hair was wet; she would probably catch a cold, waiting out here. It was only four thirty. She put her bags on the pavement and sat down next to them, just by the bus stop opposite the Embassy of Cambodia. Buses came and went, slowing down for her and then jerking forward when they realized that she had no interest in getting up and on. Many of us walked past her that afternoon, or spotted her as we rode the bus, or through the windscreens of our cars, or from our balconies. Naturally, we wondered what this girl was doing, sitting on the damp pavement in the middle of the day. We worried for her. We tend to assume the worst, here in Willesden. We watched her watching the shuttlecock. Pock, smash. Pock, smash. As if one player could imagine only a violent conclusion and the other only a hopeful return.

2013

Endnotes

- Note 1: The story is divided into twenty-one sections, which mirrors the twenty-one points needed to win a game of badminton.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Country in southeast Asia.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Area in North West London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: An architectural style from ancient Greece characterized by ornate columns, with ornamentation at the top of the columns.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Capital of Ghana, a West African country.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: The Cambodian Genocide (1975–79) saw roughly 1.7 million people die at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime, especially targeting ethnic minorities.[Return to reference 6](#)

- Note 7: Area in South East London.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Area in North West London.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: A style of table coming out of France during the reign of Louis XVI (1774–93), characterized by classical influences and a turn from the more ornamental Baroque furniture.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Backpacks.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: A style of architecture from the Tudor period in England (1485–1603).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: American actor (1920–2014).[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Area in North West London.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Newspaper circulating in the UK.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Inhabitant or native of Sudan, a country in Northeast Africa.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Country in West Africa.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Country in North Africa.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Country in Europe across the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa. The Italian island of Lampedusa is a primary point of entry to Europe for African immigrants.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: A card used to pay for London’s public transportation system.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: From Tunisia, a country in North Africa.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: The Khmer Rouge targeted “New People,” members of the urban and educated elite, who were forced into work camps. The regime defended “Old People,” those from rural areas, farms, and villages.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: A kind of raincoat.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: A chain of supermarkets in the UK.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Inhabitant or native of Lebanon, a country in the Middle East.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: The genocide of millions of European Jewish people during World War II by Nazi Germany and its allies (1941–45).[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Country in Central Africa. In 1994, armed militias killed around 600,000 people of the Tutsi ethnic minority group, and

- as many as 200,000 moderate Hutus.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: From Nigeria, a country in West Africa.[Return to reference 9](#)
 - Note 1: City in Japan. In 1945 the United States dropped an atomic bomb over the city, followed by another one three days later over the city of Nagasaki. At least 70,000 citizens were killed in Hiroshima immediately, with as many as 140,000 dying later from the effects of injury and radiation.[Return to reference 1](#)
 - Note 2: London public transit rail system.[Return to reference 2](#)
 - Note 3: British talent competition show.[Return to reference 3](#)
 - Note 4: British broadcasting company providing television service.[Return to reference 4](#)
 - Note 5: Being nervous or scared (British slang).[Return to reference 5](#)
 - Note 6: Stupid or slow (British slang).[Return to reference 6](#)
 - Note 7: Built in 1555 as a Portuguese trading post, it was later used as part of the transatlantic slave trade to hold enslaved Africans before they were transported to the Americas.[Return to reference 7](#)
 - Note 8: A major road in Rome, Italy. "Bengali": inhabitant or native of the Bengal region in South Asia.[Return to reference 8](#)
 - Note 9: Shorthand for an authoritarian government led by a dictator.[Return to reference 9](#)

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

b. 1977

The novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie may be most widely known for her feminism. Her TEDx talk, “We Should All Be Feminists,” was sampled by the American singer Beyoncé in “Flawless” (2013). Adichie published a sequel called *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), in which she builds on her earlier pronouncements that girls are taught to “shrink themselves,” that is, to limit their ambition and success, while boys are raised in a “hard, small cage” of masculinity in which they learn to avoid exposing their fear and doubts. In *Dear Ijeawele* she adopts the intimate form of a letter to a friend who has sought advice on how to raise her daughter as a feminist. Adichie suggests that women resist predetermined gender roles and seek out full personhood—an ambition that the most memorable characters of her novels achieve. In the short story “Checking Out,” about the fate of an undocumented Nigerian migrant in contemporary London, she exposes the vulnerability and humanity of a young man named Obinze. In this story, as in her novels, she narrates the enmeshment of private lives within the racial, gender, and cultural structures that shape them.

Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria, raised a Roman Catholic in the university town of Nsukka, and lived in a house that was once the residence of a Nigerian Igbo writer of an earlier generation, Chinua Achebe—a novelist she has credited as her literary

inspiration. Adichie's father was a professor of statistics at the University of Nigeria and her mother the university registrar. She tried to focus on medicine and pharmacy for a year and a half at the University of Nigeria but left for the United States at the age of nineteen to escape a medical career. She studied communication and political science at Drexel University and Eastern Connecticut University before earning master's degrees in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University and in African studies at Yale. She has held fellowships at Princeton and Harvard, and in 2008 was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. In recent years she has divided her time between the United States and Nigeria.

Adichie's fiction has been praised for its vivid characterization, bold reach, and humane warmth. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), begins with a nod to Achebe: "Things started to fall apart at home." But her novel explores tensions between Western and Igbo cultures from the perspective of a young woman, fifteen-year-old Kambili, coming of age against the backdrop of Nigeria's military coups. Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), pushes back in time to the Nigerian Civil War of the 1960s, reimagining the first of many such postcolonial conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa as endured by two sisters. But Adichie has also resisted what she calls the "war and hunger" representation of Africa in the West, arguing that, beyond such crises, millions of Africans live out "ordinary" experiences of love, pain, and loss, "just like everyone else." A transcript of her 2013 TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," which engages with the absurdity and potential harmfulness of monolithic presentations of Africa, is included earlier in this volume. Her third novel, *Americanah* (2013), winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, widened her canvas, spanning Nigeria, England, and the United States in tracking the love lives and migrant hardships of her Nigerian protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze, who fall in love as teenagers in Lagos. The title is a term for Nigerians who return from the United States with American affectations, and the book cannily observes constructions of race and gender in transnational contexts. Extending beyond Achebe's Nigerian-

centered fiction, the book's intercontinental scope exemplifies what is sometimes called the "global novel."

Part of Obinze's story also appears in Adichie's "Checking Out," among her many tightly constructed short stories (an earlier collection is *The Thing Around Your Neck* [2009]). A reflective young man, Obinze has dreamed of relocating to the United States, but, deterred by heightened restrictions after 9/11, he winds up in London, where he struggles to make a new life for himself. Lacking legal credentials, at the mercy of unscrupulous and exploitative fellow Africans, Obinze gazes wistfully at the people around him near the London Underground: "His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think, You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't even know how fortunate you are." Although the mass media constantly circulate pictures and news of multitudes on the move, Adichie harnesses the power of fiction to take readers inside the hopes, disappointments, and musings of one such person. Granted, he is more fortunate than many. Elsewhere she has remarked: "Obinze's journey is about the ways in which we become different versions of ourselves. The generally known immigration story, especially for the African immigrant, is that of leaving war or poverty. But this is about another kind of immigration, of people who do not come from burned villages, but are seeking that sublime thing: choice." For Obinze, as for millions of migrants with similar dreams and aspirations, that sublime thing is far from being within easy reach.

Checking Out

In London, night came too soon. It hung in the morning air like a threat and then in the afternoon a blue-gray dusk descended, and the Victorian buildings all wore a mournful face. In those first weeks, the weightless menace of the cold startled Obinze, drying his nostrils, deepening his anxieties, making him urinate too often. He would walk fast, his hands swallowed up by the sleeves of the gray wool coat his cousin had lent him. Sometimes he would stop outside a tube station,¹ often by a flower or a newspaper vender, and watch the people brushing past. They walked so quickly, as if they had an important destination, a purpose to their lives. His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think, You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't even know how fortunate you are.

It was at a tube station that he met the Angolans who would arrange his marriage, exactly two years and three days after he had arrived in England; he kept count.

"We'll talk in the car," one of them had said over the phone. Their old black Mercedes was fussily maintained, the floor mats wavy from vacuuming, the leather seats shiny with polish. The two Angolans looked alike, with thick eyebrows that almost touched, and they were dressed alike, too, in leather jackets and long gold chains. Their tabletop hair, which sat on their heads like tall hats, surprised him, but perhaps having retro haircuts was part of their hip image. They spoke to him with the authority of people who had done this before, and also with a slight condescension; his fate, after all, was in their hands.

"We decided on Newcastle² because we know people there and London is too hot right now—too many marriages happening in London, yeah?—so we don't want trouble," one of them said.

"Everything is going to work out. Just make sure you keep a low

profile, yeah? Don't attract any attention to yourself until the marriage is done. Don't fight in the pub, yeah?"

"I've never been a very good fighter," Obinze said dryly, but the Angolans did not smile.

"You have the money?" the other one asked.

Obinze handed over two hundred pounds, all in twenty-pound notes that he had taken out of the cash machine over two days. It was a deposit, to prove that he was serious. Later, after he met the girl, he would pay two thousand pounds.

"The rest has to be up front, yeah? We'll use some of it to do the running around and the rest goes to the girl. Man, you know we're not making anything from this. We usually ask for much more, but we're doing this for your cousin," the first one said.

Obinze did not believe them, even then. He met the girl, Cleotilde, a few days later, at a shopping center, in a McDonald's whose windows looked out onto the dank entrance of a tube station across the street. He sat at a table with the Angolans and watched people hurry past, wondering if one of them was she, while the Angolans whispered into their phones; perhaps they were arranging other marriages.

"Hello there!" she said.

She surprised him. He had expected someone with pockmarks smothered under heavy makeup, someone tough and knowing. But here she was, dewy and fresh, bespectacled, olive-skinned, almost childlike, smiling shyly at him and sucking a milkshake through a straw. She looked like a university freshman who was innocent or dumb, or both.

"I just want to be sure that you're sure about doing this," he told her. Then, worried that he might frighten her away, he added, "I'm very grateful, and it won't take too much from you—in a year I'll have my papers and we'll do the divorce. But I just wanted to meet you first and make sure you are O.K. to do this."

"Yes," she said.

He watched her, expecting more. She played with her straw, not meeting his eyes, and it took him a while to realize that she was

reacting more to him than to the situation. She was attracted to him.

"I want to help my mom out. Things are tight at home," she said, a trace of a non-British accent underlining her words.

"She's with us, yeah," one of the Angolans said impatiently.

"Show him your details, Cleo," the other Angolan said.

His calling her Cleo rang false; Obinze sensed this from the slight surprise on her face. It was a forced intimacy: the Angolan had never called her Cleo before. Obinze wondered how the Angolans knew her. Did they have a list of young women with European Union passports who needed money? Cleotilde pushed at her hair, a mass of tight coils, and adjusted her glasses, as though preparing herself, then presented her passport and license. Obinze examined them. He would have thought her younger than twenty-three.

"Can I have your number?" Obinze asked.

"Just call us for anything," the Angolans said, almost at the same time. But Obinze wrote his number on a napkin and pushed it across to Cleotilde. The Angolans gave him a sly look.

The next day, on the phone, she told him that she had been living in London for six years, and was saving money to go to fashion school; the Angolans had told him that she lived in Portugal.

"Would you like to meet again?" he asked. "It will be much easier if we try to get to know each other a little."

"Yes," she said without hesitation.

They ate fish-and-chips in a pub, a thin crust of grime on the sides of the wooden table, while she talked about her love of fashion and asked him about Nigerian traditional dress. She seemed a little more mature this time; he noticed the shimmer on her cheeks, the more defined curl of her hair, and knew that she had made an effort with her appearance.

"What will you do after you get your papers?" she asked him.

"Will you bring your girlfriend from Nigeria?"

He was touched by her obviousness. "I don't have a girlfriend."

"I've never been to Africa. I'd love to go." She said "Africa" wistfully, like an admiring foreigner, loading the word with exotic

excitement. Her black Angolan father had left her white Portuguese mother when she was three, she told him, and she had not seen him since, nor had she ever been to Angola. She said this with a shrug and a cynical raise of her eyebrows, as though it had never bothered her, an effort so out of character, so jarring, that it showed him just how deeply it did bother her. There were difficulties in her life that he wanted to know more about, parts of her thick, shapely body that he longed to touch, but he was wary of complicating things. He would wait until after the wedding, until the business side of their relationship was finished. She seemed to understand this without their talking about it. And so, as they met in the following weeks, sometimes practicing how they would answer questions during their immigration interview and other times just talking about football,³ there was, between them, the growing urgency of restrained desire. It was there in how close they stood, not touching, as they waited at the tube station, and in their teasing each other about his support of Arsenal and her support of Manchester United.⁴ After he paid the Angolans the additional two thousand pounds, she told him that they had given her only five hundred.

"I'm just telling you. I know you don't have any more money. I want to do this for you," she said.

He wanted to kiss her, her upper lip pinker and shinier with lip gloss than the lower, to hold her, to tell her how deeply, irrepressibly grateful he was. She would never flaunt her power over him. One Eastern European woman, Iloba had told him, had asked a Nigerian man, an hour before their wedding, to give her a thousand pounds extra not to walk away. In a panic, the man had had to call all of his friends to raise the money.

When Obinze asked the Angolans how much they had given Cleotilde, they said, "Man, we gave you a good deal," in the tone of people who knew how much they were needed. It was they, after all, who took him to a lawyer, a low-voiced Nigerian in a swivel chair, who slid backward to reach a file cabinet as he said, "You can still get married, even though your visa is expired. In fact, getting married is now your only choice." It was they who provided water

and gas bills, going back six months, with his name and a Newcastle address. And it was they who found a man who would “sort out” his driver’s license, a man called Brown. Obinze met Brown at the train station in Barking;⁵ he stood near the gate, amid the bustle of people, looking around and waiting for his phone to ring, since Brown had refused to give him a phone number.

“Are you waiting for somebody?” Brown asked, when he appeared. He was a slight man, his winter hat pulled down to his eyebrows.

“Yes. I’m Obinze,” he said, feeling like a character in a spy novel. Brown led him to a quiet corner, handed over an envelope, and there it was, his license, with his photo. It had the genuine, slightly worn look of something owned for a year. A small plastic card, but it weighed down his pocket. A few days later, he walked with it into a London building that looked like a church, steepled and grave from the outside, but inside was shabby, harried, knotted with people. Signs were scrawled on whiteboards:

Births and deaths this way. Marriage registration this way.

Obinze, his expression carefully frozen in neutrality, handed the license over to the registrar behind the desk.

A woman was walking toward the door, talking loudly to her companion. “Look how crowded this place is,” she said. “It’s all sham marriages, all of them, now that Blunkett⁶ is after them.”

Perhaps she had come to register a death, and her words were merely the lonely lashings-out of grief, but he felt the familiar tightening of panic in his chest. The registrar was examining his license, taking too long. The seconds lengthened and curdled. “*All sham marriages, all of them*,” rang in Obinze’s head. Finally, the registrar looked up and pushed across a form.

“Getting married, are we? Congratulations!” The words came out with the mechanical good cheer of frequent repetition.

“Thank you,” Obinze said, and tried to unfreeze his face.

Behind the desk, a whiteboard was propped against a wall, with venues and dates of intended marriages scrawled in blue; a name at the bottom caught his eye. Okoli Okafor and Crystal Smith. Okoli Okafor had been his classmate in secondary school and at university, a quiet boy who had been teased for having a surname for a first name, who later joined a vicious cult at university, and then left Nigeria during one of the long strikes.⁷

The memory, clear as a beam of light, took Obinze back to a time when he still believed the universe would bend according to his will. Once, during his final year at university, the year that people danced in the streets because General Abacha⁸ had died, his mother had said, "One day, I will look up and all the people I know will be dead or abroad." For a moment, he felt as if he had betrayed her by having his own plan: to get a postgraduate degree in America, to work in America, to live in America. Of course, he knew how unreasonable the American Consulate could be—the vice-chancellor, of all people, had once been refused a visa to attend a conference—but he had never doubted his plan. He would wonder, later, why he had been so sure. Perhaps it was because he had never just wanted to go abroad, as many others did; some people were now even going to South Africa, which amused him. It had always been America, only America. A longing nurtured and nursed over many years. An advertisement on NTA⁹ for "Andrew Checking Out," which he had watched as a child, had given shape to his longings. "Men, I'm checkin' out," the character Andrew had said, staring cockily at the camera. "No good roads, no light, no water. Men, you can't even get a common bottle of soft drink!" While Andrew was checking out, General Buhari's¹ soldiers were flogging adults in the streets, lecturers were striking for better pay, and Obinze's mother decided that he could no longer have Fanta whenever he wanted but only on Sundays. America became a place where bottles of Fanta could be had without permission. Obinze would stand in front of the mirror and repeat Andrew's words: "Men, I'm checkin' out!" Later, when he sought out magazines and books and films and secondhand stories about America, his longing took on a minor mystical quality. He saw

himself walking the streets of Harlem, discussing the merits of Mark Twain with his American friends, gazing at Mt. Rushmore. Days after he graduated from university, bloated with knowledge about America, he applied for a visa at the consulate in Lagos.

He already knew that the best interviewer was the man with the blond beard, and, as the line moved forward, he hoped that he would not be interviewed by the horror story, a pretty white woman famous for screaming into her microphone and insulting even grandmothers. Finally, it was his turn, and the blond-bearded man said, "Next person!" Obinze walked up and slid his forms underneath the glass. The man glanced at the forms and said, kindly, "Sorry, you don't qualify. Next person!" Obinze was stunned. He went three more times in the next few months. Each time, he was told, with barely a glance at his documents, "Sorry, you don't qualify," and each time he emerged from the air-conditioned cool of the consulate into the harsh sunlight stunned and unbelieving.

"It's the terrorism fears," his mother said. "The Americans are now averse to foreign young men."

She told him to find a job and try again in a year. But his job applications yielded nothing. He travelled to Lagos and to Port Harcourt and to Abuja to take assessment tests, which he found easy, and then attended interviews, answering questions fluidly, but only long silences followed. Some of his friends got jobs, people who did not have his second-class upper degree and who did not speak as well as he did. He wondered if employers could smell his America-pining on his breath, or sense how obsessively he still looked at the Web sites of American universities.

One day, his mother left him a note on the bathroom sink: "I have been invited to an academic conference in London. We should speak." He was puzzled. When she came home from her lecture, he was in the living room waiting for her.

"Mummy, *nno*,"² he said.

She acknowledged his greeting with a nod. "I'm going to put your name on my British visa application as my research assistant," she said quietly. "That should get you a six-month visa. You can stay

with Nicholas in London. See what you can do with your life. Maybe you can get to America from there. I know that your mind is no longer here."

He stared at her.

"I understand this sort of thing is done nowadays," she said, sitting down on the sofa beside him, and trying to sound offhand, but in the uncommon briskness of her words he sensed her discomfort. She was a woman who asked no favors, who would not lie, who would not accept even a Christmas card from her students, because it might compromise her. Yet here she was, behaving as though truth-telling were a luxury that they could no longer afford. She had lied for him. If anyone else had lied for him, it would not have mattered as much or even at all, but she lied for him and he got a six-month visa to the United Kingdom. He felt, even before he left, like a failure. He did not contact her for months, while he stayed with his cousin Nicholas, in Essex.³ He did not contact her because there was nothing to tell and he wanted to wait until he had something to tell. Throughout his stay in England, he had spoken to her only a few times, strained conversations during which he felt her wondering why he had made nothing of himself. But she never asked for details; she only waited to hear what he was willing to tell.

Everyone joked about people who went abroad to clean toilets, and so Obinze approached his first job with irony: he was indeed abroad cleaning toilets, wearing rubber gloves and carrying a pail, in an estate agent's office on the second floor of a London building. Each time he opened the swinging door of a stall, it seemed to sigh. The beautiful woman who cleaned the ladies' toilet was Ghanaian, about his age, with the shiniest dark skin he had ever seen. He sensed, in the way she spoke and carried herself, that she came from a background similar to his, a childhood cushioned by family, regular meals, and dreams in which there was no conception of cleaning toilets in London. She ignored his friendly gestures, saying only "Good evening" as formally as she could, but she was friendly with the Polish woman who cleaned the offices upstairs, and once he saw

them in a deserted café, drinking tea and talking in low tones. He stood watching them for a while, a great grievance exploding in his mind. He was too close to what she was; he knew her nuances, while with the Polish woman she was free to reinvent herself, to be whoever she wanted to be.

The toilets were not bad—some urine outside the urinal, some unfinished flushing. So he was shocked, one evening, to walk into a stall and discover a mound of shit on the toilet lid, solid, tapering, centered as though it had been carefully arranged. It looked like a puppy curled on a mat. It was a performance. He thought about the famed repression of the English. There was, in this performance, something of an unbuttoning. A person who had been fired? Denied a promotion? Obinze stared at that mound of shit for a long time, feeling smaller and smaller as he did so, until it became a personal affront, a punch to his jaw. And all for three quid⁴ an hour. He took off his gloves, placed them next to the mound of shit, and left the building.

Obinze had not remembered that Iloba now lived in London; he had last seen him days before graduation. Iloba was merely from his mother's hometown, but he had been so enthusiastic about their kinship that everyone on campus assumed that they were cousins. Iloba would often pull up a chair, smiling and uninvited, and join Obinze and his friends at a roadside bar, or appear at Obinze's door on Sunday afternoons. Once, Iloba had stopped Obinze on the General Studies quad, cheerfully calling out "Kinsman!" and then giving him a rundown of marriages and deaths of people from his mother's home town whom he hardly knew. "Udoakpuanyi died some weeks ago. Don't you know him? Their homestead is next to your mother's." Obinze nodded and made appropriate sounds, humoring Iloba, because Iloba's demeanor was always so pleasant and oblivious, his trousers always too tight and too short, showing his bony ankles; they had earned him the nickname Iloba Jump Up.

Obinze got his phone number from Nicholas and called him.

"The Zed!⁵ Kinsman! You did not tell me you were coming to London!" Iloba said, using Obinze's old nickname. "How is your mother? What of your uncle, the one who married from Abagana? How is Nicholas?" Iloba sounded full of a simple happiness. There were people who were born with an inability to be tangled up in dark emotions, in complications, and Iloba was one of them. With such people, Obinze felt both admiration and boredom. When Obinze asked if Iloba might be able to help him find a National Insurance number, he would have understood a little resentment, a little churlishness—after all, he was contacting Iloba only because he needed something—but it surprised him how sincerely eager to help Iloba was.

"I would let you use mine, but I am working with it and it is risky," Iloba said.

"Where do you work?"

"In central London. Security. It's not easy, this country is not easy, but we are managing. I like the night shifts, because it gives me time to read for my course. I'm doing a master's in management at Birkbeck College."⁶ Iloba paused. "The Zed, don't worry, we will put our heads together. Let me ask around and let you know."

Iloba called back two weeks later to say that he had found somebody. "His name is Vincent Obi. He is from Abia State."⁷ A friend of mine did the connection. He wants to meet you tomorrow evening."

They met in Iloba's flat. A claustrophobic feel pervaded the concrete neighborhood with scarred walls and no trees. Everything seemed too small, too tight.

"Nice place," Obinze said, not because the flat was nice but because Iloba had a flat in London.

"I would have told you to come and stay with me, the Zed, but I live with two of my cousins." Iloba placed bottles of beer and a small plate of fried chin-chin⁸ on the table. The ritual of hospitality raised a sharp homesickness in Obinze. He was reminded of going back to

his mother's village with her at Christmas, aunties offering him plates of chin-chin.

Vincent Obi was a small round man, submerged in a large pair of jeans and an ungainly coat. As he and Obinze shook hands, they sized each other up. From the set of Vincent's shoulders and the abrasiveness of his manner, Obinze sensed that he had learned early on, as a matter of necessity, to solve his own problems. Obinze imagined Vincent's Nigerian life: a community secondary school full of barefoot children; a polytechnic paid for with the help of a number of uncles; a family of many children; and a crowd of dependents in his hometown who, whenever he visited, would expect large loaves of bread and pocket money carefully distributed to each of them. Obinze saw himself through Vincent's eyes: a university staff child who grew up eating butter and now needed his help. At first, Vincent affected a British accent, saying "innit"⁹ too many times.

"This is business, innit, but I'm helping you. You can use my N.I. number and pay me forty per cent of what you make," Vincent said. "It's business, innit. If I don't get what we agree on, I will report you."

"My brother," Obinze said. "That's a little too much. You know my situation. I don't have anything. Please try and come down."

"Thirty-five per cent is the best I can do. This is business." He lost his accent and now spoke Nigerian English. "Let me tell you, there are many people in your situation."

Iloba spoke in Igbo: "Vincent, my brother here is trying to save money and do his papers. Thirty-five is too much. Please just try and help us."

"You know that some people take half. Yes, he is in a situation, but all of us are in a situation. I am helping him, but this is business." Vincent's Igbo had a rural accent. He put the National Insurance card on the table and started to write his bank-account number on a piece of paper. That evening, as dusk fell, the sky muting to a pale violet, Obinze became Vincent.

The warehouse chief looked like the archetype of an Englishman that Obinze carried in his mind: tall and spare, sandy-haired and blue-eyed. But he was a smiling man, and in Obinze's imagination Englishmen were not smiling men. His name was Roy Snell. He vigorously shook Obinze's hand.

"So, Vincent, you're from Africa?" he asked, as he took Obinze around the warehouse, which was the size of a football field and alive with trucks being loaded, flattened cardboard boxes being folded into a deep pit, and men talking.

"Yes. I was born in Birmingham¹ and went back to Nigeria when I was six." It was the story that he and Iloba had agreed was most convincing.

"Why did you come back? How bad are things in Nigeria?"

"I just wanted to see if I could have a better life here."

Roy Snell nodded. He seemed like a person for whom the word "jolly" would always be apt. "You'll work with Nigel today—he's our youngest," he said, gesturing toward a man with a pale doughy body, spiky dark hair, and an almost cherubic face. "I think you'll like working here, Vinny Boy!" It had taken him five minutes to go from Vincent to Vinny Boy and, in the following months, when they played table tennis during lunch break, Roy would tell the men, "I've got to beat Vinny Boy for once!" And they would titter and repeat "Vinny Boy."

It amused Obinze how keenly the men flipped through their newspapers every morning, stopping at the photo of the big-breasted woman, examining it as though it were an article of great interest, different from the photo on that same page the previous day, the previous week. Their conversations, as they waited for their trucks to be loaded up, were always about cars and football and, most of all, women, each man telling stories that sounded similar to stories told the day before, the week before. Each time they mentioned knickers—"the bird flashed her knickers"—Obinze was even more amused, because knickers, in Nigerian English, were shorts rather than underwear, and he imagined these nubile women

in ill-fitting khaki shorts, the kind he had worn as a junior student in secondary school.

Roy Snell's greeting every morning was a jab to his belly. "Vinny Boy! You all right? You all right?" he would ask. He always put Obinze's name up for the outside work that paid better, always asked if he wanted to work weekends, which was double time, always asked about girls. It was as if Roy held a special affection for him, which was both protective and kind.

"You haven't had a shag since you came to the U.K., have you, Vinny Boy? I could give you this bird's number," he said once.

"I have a girlfriend back home," Obinze said.

"So what's wrong with a little shag, then?"

A few men nearby laughed.

"My girlfriend has magical powers," Obinze said.

Roy found this funnier than Obinze thought it was. He laughed and laughed. "She's into witchcraft, is she? All right, then, no shags for you. I've always wanted to go to Africa, Vinny Boy. I think I'll take a holiday and go to Nigeria when you're back there for a visit. You can show me around, find me some Nigerian birds, Vinny Boy, but no witchcraft!"

"Yes, I could do that."

"Oh, I know you could! You look like you know what to do with the birds," Roy said, with another jab at Obinze's belly.

Roy often assigned Obinze to work with Nigel, perhaps because they were the youngest men in the warehouse. That first morning, Obinze noticed that the other men, drinking coffee from paper cups and checking the board to see who would be working with whom, were laughing at Nigel. Nigel had no eyebrows; the patches of slightly pink skin where his eyebrows should have been gave his plump face an unfinished, ghostly look.

"I got pissed² at the pub and my mates shaved off my eyebrows," Nigel told Obinze, almost apologetically, as they shook hands.

"No shagging for you until you grow your eyebrows back, mate," one of the men called out as Nigel and Obinze headed for the truck. Obinze secured the washing machines at the back, tightening the straps until they were snug, and then climbed in and studied the map to find the shortest routes to their delivery addresses. Nigel took bends sharply and muttered about how people drove these days. At a traffic light, he brought out a bottle of cologne from a bag he had placed at his feet, sprayed it on his neck, and then offered it to Obinze.

"No, thanks," Obinze said. Nigel shrugged. Days later, he offered it again. The truck interior was dense with the scent of his cologne and, from time to time, Obinze would take deep gulps of fresh air through the open window.

"You're just new from Africa. You haven't seen the London sights, have you, mate?" Nigel asked.

"No," Obinze said.

And so, after early deliveries in central London, Nigel would take him for a drive, showing him Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, Tower Bridge, all the while talking about his mother's arthritis, and about his girlfriend Haley's knockers. It took a while for Obinze to completely understand what Nigel said, because of his accent, each word twisted and stretched. Once Nigel said "male" and Obinze thought he had said "mile," and, when Obinze finally understood what Nigel meant, Nigel laughed and said, "You talk kind of posh, don't you? African posh."

One day, months into his job, after they had delivered a fridge to an address in Kensington,³ Nigel said, of the elderly man who had come into the kitchen while they were installing it, "He's a real gent, he is." Nigel's tone was admiring, slightly cowed. The man had looked dishevelled and hungover, his hair tousled, his robe open at the chest, and he had said, archly, "You do know how to put it all together," as though he did not think they did. It amazed Obinze that, because Nigel thought the man was a "real gent," he did not complain about the dirty kitchen, as he ordinarily would have done.

If the man had spoken with a different accent, Nigel would have called him miserly for not giving them a tip.

They were approaching their next delivery address, in South London, and Obinze had just called the homeowner to say that they were almost there, when Nigel blurted out, "What do you say to a girl you like?"

"What do you mean?" Obinze asked.

"Truth is, I'm not really shagging Haley. I like her, but I don't know how to tell her. The other day, I went round her house and there was another bloke there." Nigel paused. Obinze tried to keep his face expressionless. "You look like you know what to say to the birds, mate," Nigel added.

"Just tell her you like her," Obinze said, thinking how seamlessly Nigel, at the warehouse with the other men, contributed stories about shagging Haley, and, once, about shagging her friend while Haley was away on holiday. "No games and no lines. Just say, 'Look, I like you and I think you're beautiful.' "

Nigel gave him a wounded glance. It was as if he had convinced himself that Obinze was skilled in the art of women; he expected some profundity, which Obinze wished, as he loaded a dishwasher onto a trolley and wheeled it to the door, that he had. An Indian woman opened the door, a portly, kindly housewife, who offered them tea. Many people offered tea or water. A sad-looking woman had once offered Obinze a small pot of homemade jam, and he had hesitated, but he sensed that whatever deep unhappiness she had would be compounded if he said no, and so he had taken the jam home, where it was still languishing in the fridge, unopened.

"Thank you, thank you," the Indian woman said, as Obinze and Nigel installed the new dishwasher and rolled away the old one.

At the door, she gave Nigel a tip. Nigel was the only driver who split the tips down the middle with Obinze; the others pretended not to remember to share. Once, when Obinze was working with another driver, an old Jamaican woman pushed ten pounds into his pocket when the driver wasn't looking. "Thank you, brother," she said, and it made him want to call his mother in Nsukka⁴ and tell her about it.

One morning in early summer, Obinze arrived at the warehouse and knew right away that something was amiss. The men avoided his eyes, and Nigel turned swiftly—too swiftly—toward the toilet when he saw Obinze. They knew. They had somehow found out. They saw the headlines about asylum seekers draining the National Health Service, they thought of the hordes further crowding a crowded island, and now they knew that he was one of the damned, working with a name that was not his. Where was Roy Snell? Had he gone to call the police? Was it the police that you called? Obinze tried to remember details from the stories of people who had been caught and deported, but his mind was numb. He felt naked. He wanted to turn and run, but his body kept moving, against his will, toward the loading area. Then he sensed a movement behind him, quick and violent and too close, and, before he could turn around, a paper hat was pushed onto his head. It was Nigel, and with him a crowd of grinning men.

“Happy birthday, Vinny Boy!” they all said.

Obinze froze, frightened by the complete blankness of his mind. Then he realized what it was. Vincent’s birthday. Roy must have told the men. Even he had not remembered to remember Vincent’s date of birth.

“Oh!” was all he said, nauseated with relief.

Nigel asked him to come into the coffee room, where all the men were trooping in, passing around the muffins and Coke they had bought with their own money in honor of a birthday they believed was his. A realization brought tears to his eyes: he felt safe.

Obinze was mildly surprised when Vincent called him that night, because he had called him only once before, months ago, when he changed his bank and wanted to give him the new account number. He wondered whether to say “Happy birthday” to Vincent, whether the call was indeed related to his birthday.

“Vincent, *kedu?*”⁵ he said.

“I want a raise.”

Had Vincent learned that from a film? The words sounded contrived and comical. "I want forty-five per cent. I know you are working more now."

"Vincent, ahn-ahn.⁶ How much am I making? You know I am saving money to do this marriage thing."

"Forty-five per cent," Vincent said, and hung up.

Obinze decided to ignore him. He knew Vincent's type; he would push to see how far he could go and then he would retreat. If Obinze called back and tried to negotiate, it might embolden Vincent to make more demands. But he would not risk losing Obinze's regular weekly deposit entirely.

And so when, a week later, in the morning bustle of drivers and trucks, Roy said, "Vinny Boy, step into my office for a minute," Obinze thought nothing of it. On Roy's desk was a newspaper, folded at the page with the photo of the big-breasted woman. Roy slowly put his cup of coffee on top of the newspaper. He seemed uncomfortable, and wouldn't look directly at Obinze.

"Somebody called yesterday," he told Obinze. "Said you're not who you say you are—that you're illegal and working with a Brit's name." There was a pause. Obinze was stung with surprise. Roy picked up the coffee cup again. "Why don't you just bring in your passport tomorrow and we'll clear it up, all right?"

Obinze mumbled the first words that came to him. "O.K. I'll bring my passport tomorrow." He walked out of the office knowing that he would never feel again what he had felt moments ago. Was Roy merely asking him to bring in his passport to make the dismissal easier for him, to give him an exit, or did Roy really believe that the caller had been lying? Why would anybody call about such a thing unless it was true? Obinze had never made as much of an effort as he did the rest of the day to seem normal, to tame the rage that was engulfing him. It was not the thought of the power that Vincent had over him that infuriated him but the recklessness with which Vincent had exercised it. He left the warehouse that evening for the final time, wishing more than anything that he had told Nigel and Roy his real name.

The Angolans told him that things had “gone up,” or were “tough,” opaque words that were supposed to explain each new request for more money.

“This is not what we agreed to,” Obinze would say, or “I don’t have any extra cash right now,” and they would reply, “Things have gone up, yeah,” in a tone that he imagined was accompanied by a shrug. A silence would follow, a wordlessness over the phone line that told him that it was his problem, not theirs. “I’ll pay it in by Friday,” he would say, finally, before hanging up.

Nicholas gave Obinze a suit for the wedding. “It’s a good Italian suit,” he said. “It’s small for me, so it should fit you.” The trousers were big, and they bunched up when Obinze tightened his belt, but the jacket, also big, shielded the unsightly pleat of cloth at his waist. Not that he minded. He was so focussed on finally beginning his life that he would have swaddled his lower parts in a baby’s napkin² if it had been required. He and Iloba met Cleotilde near City Center. She was standing under a tree with some friends, her hair pushed back with a white band, her eyes boldly lined in black; she looked like an older, sexier person. Her ivory dress was tight at the hips. He had paid for the dress. “I haven’t got any proper going-out dress,” she had said, in apology, when she called to tell him that she had nothing that looked convincingly bridal.

She hugged him. She looked nervous, and he tried to deflect his own nervousness by thinking about them together after this—how, in less than an hour, he would be free to walk with surer steps on Britain’s streets, and free to kiss her.

“You have the rings?” Iloba asked her.

“Yes,” Cleotilde said.

She and Obinze had bought them the week before, plain, cheap matching rings from a side-street shop, and she had looked so delighted, laughingly slipping different rings on and off her finger, that he wondered if she wished it were a real wedding.

"Fifteen minutes to go," Iloba said. He took pictures, his digital camera held away from his face, saying, "Move closer! O.K., one more!" His sprightly good spirits annoyed Obinze. On the train up to Newcastle the previous day, while Obinze had spent his time looking out the window, unable even to read, Iloba had talked and talked, until his voice became a distant murmur, perhaps because he was trying to keep Obinze from worrying too much. Now he talked to Cleotilde's friends with easy friendliness about the new Chelsea manager, about "Big Brother,"⁸ as if they were all there for something ordinary and normal.

"Time to go," Iloba said. They walked toward the civic center. The afternoon was bright with sunshine. Obinze opened the door and stood aside for the others to go ahead, into the sterile hallway, where they paused to get their bearings, to be sure which way the registry office was. Two policemen stood behind the door, watching them with stony eyes. Obinze quieted his panic. There was nothing to worry about, nothing at all, he told himself; the civic center probably had policemen present as a matter of routine. But he sensed in the sudden smallness of the hallway, the sudden thickening of doom in the air, that something was wrong. Then another man approached him, his shirtsleeves rolled up, his cheeks so red that he looked as though he were wearing terrible makeup.

"Are you Obinze Maduewesi?" the red-cheeked man asked. In his hands was a sheaf of papers in which Obinze could see a photocopy of his passport.

"Yes," Obinze said quietly, and that word was an acknowledgment to the red-cheeked immigration officer, to Iloba, to Cleotilde, and to himself that it was over.

"Your visa is expired and you are not allowed to be present in the U.K.," the man said.

One of the policemen clamped handcuffs around his wrists. He felt himself watching the scene from far away, watching himself walk to the police car outside, and sink into the too-soft seat in the back. There had been so many times in the past when he had feared that this would happen, so many moments that had become one single

blur of panic, and now it felt like the dull echo of an aftermath. Cleotilde flung herself on the ground and began to cry. She may never have visited her father's country, but he was convinced at that moment of her Africanness; how else would she have been able to fling herself to the ground with that perfect dramatic flourish? He wondered if her tears were for him or for herself, or for what might have been between them. She had no need to worry; the policemen barely glanced at her. It was he who felt the heaviness of the handcuffs during the drive to the police station, he who silently handed over his watch and his belt and his wallet and his phone. Nicholas's large trousers were slipping down his hips.

"Your shoes, too. Take off your shoes," the policeman said.

He took off his shoes. He was led to a cell. It was small, with brown walls, and metal bars so thick that his hand could not get around one. It reminded him of the chimpanzee cage at Nsukka's dismal, forgotten zoo. From the high ceiling, a single bulb burned. There was an emptying, echoing vastness in the tiny cell.

"Were you aware that your visa had expired?"

"Yes," Obinze said.

"Were you about to have a sham marriage?"

"No. Cleotilde and I have been dating for a while."

"I can arrange for a lawyer for you, but it's obvious you'll be deported," the immigration officer said evenly.

When the lawyer came, puffy-faced, dark arcs under his eyes, Obinze thought of all the films in which the state lawyer is distracted and exhausted. He came with a bag but did not open it, and he sat across from Obinze, holding nothing—no file, no paper, no pen. He was pleasant and sympathetic.

"The government has a strong case. We can appeal, but, to be honest, it will only delay the case. You will eventually be removed from the U.K.," he said, with the air of a man who had said those same words, in the same tone, more times than he wished to, or could, remember.

"I'm willing to go back to Nigeria," Obinze said. The last shred of his dignity was like a wrapper slipping off his waist that he was

desperate to retire.

The lawyer looked surprised. "O.K., then," he said, and got up a little too hastily, as though grateful that his job had been made easier. Obinze watched him leave. He was going to check a box on a form that said that his client was willing to be removed. Removed. The word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing.

2013

Endnotes

- Note 1: London Underground (subway) station.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: City in northern England.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Soccer.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Soccer team, with Arsenal, in the English Premier League.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: Suburban town in East London.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: David Blunkett (b. 1947), former British politician who endorsed tighter immigration measures after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Faculty and staff labor strikes, some lasting months during the 1980s and 1990s.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: General Sani Abacha (1943–1998), president of Nigeria after a military coup in 1993, responsible for human-rights abuses.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Nigerian Television Authority.[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Muhammadu Buhari (b. 1942), who seized control of Nigeria in 1983 after a military coup, responded harshly to critics. He was deposed in 1985 but elected president in 2015.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Welcome (Igbo).[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: County northeast of London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Pounds sterling.[Return to reference 4](#)

- Note 5: Obinze's nickname. The letter "z" is pronounced "zed" in Britain and most of its former colonies.[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: A constituent college of the University of London.[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: In southeastern Nigeria.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Deep-fried Nigerian snack.[Return to reference 8](#)
- Note 9: Isn't it? (British slang).[Return to reference 9](#)
- Note 1: Major city in central England.[Return to reference 1](#)
- Note 2: Drunk.[Return to reference 2](#)
- Note 3: Affluent district in West London.[Return to reference 3](#)
- Note 4: Town in southeastern Nigeria.[Return to reference 4](#)
- Note 5: What's up? (Igbo).[Return to reference 5](#)
- Note 6: Or "ah-ah," expression of surprise (Igbo).[Return to reference 6](#)
- Note 7: Diaper.[Return to reference 7](#)
- Note 8: Reality TV show. "Chelsea manager": soccer coach of Chelsea, another Premier League team.[Return to reference 8](#)

APPENDICES

Volume D: The Romantic Period

General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the

editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English Literature*. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of*

British Theatre, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by

subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos (https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm and https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at www.mla.org/public) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th

ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the *Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at www.loebclassics.com.

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online. There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

Literary Criticism and Theory

The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and*

Criticism, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and ’80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and ’30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson,

Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G.

Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and*

Imperialism (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth

S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

Literary Terminology*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

accent (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

act: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

aesthetics (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

Alexandrine: a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

allegory (Greek “saying otherwise”): saying one thing (the “vehicle” of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory’s “tenor”). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** (“John is a lion”), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

alliteration (from Latin “litera,” alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words.

This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

allusion: Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

anagnorisis (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

anapest: a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

anaphora (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

animal fable: a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

antithesis (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1448).

apostrophe (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

apposition: a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases "heaven-kingdom's Guardian," "the Measurer's might," "his mind-plans," and "the work of the Glory-Father" each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of "praise."

assonance (Latin "sounding to"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-

rhyme. Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," line 100: "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed" (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

aubade (originally from Spanish "alba," dawn): a **genre**. A lover's dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, "The Sun Rising" (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in "Aubade" (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

autobiography (Greek "self-life writing"): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author's path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.

ballad stanza: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See "Sir Patrick Spens" (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett's poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, "This Be The Verse" (vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

ballade: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, "send off"). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

bathos (Greek "depth"): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: "Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last" (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

beast epic: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

biography (Greek "life-writing"): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

blank verse: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil's *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare's plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

blazon: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved's face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

burlesque (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

caesura (Latin “cut”) (plural “caesurae”): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, “Colonization in Reverse,” lines 5–8: “By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun” (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

canon (Greek “rule”): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

catastrophe (Greek “overturning”): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

catharsis (Greek “cleansing”): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

character (Greek “stamp, impression”): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the “fuller,” or more “rounded,” a character is said to be. A “stock” character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

chiasmus (Greek “crosswise”): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, “Eloisa to Abelard,” line 104, “The crime was common, common be the pain” (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: “They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide” (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

classical, classicism, classic: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, “classical” primarily describes the works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. “Classicism” denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. “Classic” denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

climax (Greek “ladder”): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: “Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement” (see vol. B, pp. 1167–68).

comedy: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

comic mode: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

connotation: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term “depression” and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase “the blues.”

consonance (Latin “sounding with”): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose vowel sounds are different. Herbert, “Easter,” line 13: “Consort, both heart and lute . . .” (see vol. B, p. 1183).

convention: a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

couplet: a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek “two lines”) is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: “Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me” (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

dactyl (Greek “finger,” because of the finger’s three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, “Oregon.”

decorum (Latin “that which is fitting”): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

deixis (Greek “pointing”): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a “here” and a “now” from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as “here,” “there,” “this,” “that,” “now,” “then”) are examples of deixis, or “deictics.” This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

denotation: A word has a basic, “prosaic” (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word “steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

denouement (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

dialogue (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

diction, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

didactic mode (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

diegesis (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; they is therefore extradiegetic.

dimeter (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Ruming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for single lines, as in Herbert, “Discipline,” line 3: “O my God” (see vol. B, p. 1197).

discourse (Latin “running to and fro”): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

dramatic irony: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

dramatic monologue (Greek “single speaking”): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, “Ulysses” (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, “The Bishop Orders His Tomb” (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, “Medusa” and “Mrs Lazarus” (vol. F).

ecphrasis (Greek “speaking out”): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts” (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

elegy: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid’s *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne (“On His Mistress” [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later

seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F).

emblem (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such interpretation.

end-stopping: the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

enjambment (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

epic (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1427); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, [p. 808](#)). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

epigram: a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, [p. 1049](#)).

epigraph (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

epistle (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals. The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

epitaph: a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

epithalamion (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

epyllion (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

essay (French “trial, attempt”): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

euphemism (Greek “sweet saying”): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, “he passed away”).

exegesis (Greek “leading out”): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

exemplum (Latin “example”): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

fabliau (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

farce (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

figures of speech: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

figures of thought: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

first-person narration: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

frame narrative: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

free indirect style: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child’s manner of perception: “—I begin:

the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

genre and mode: The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric,** and **didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

georgic (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

hermeneutics (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

heroic poetry: see **epic**.

hexameter (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

homily (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

homophone (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

hyperbaton (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1430).

hyperbole (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1273); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

hypermetrical (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

hypotaxis, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: "As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river's mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he" (vol. B, p. 1588). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

iamb: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, "Vermont."

imitation: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

irony (Greek "dissimulation"): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. "It's a beautiful day" is unironic if it's a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift's "Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

journal (French "daily"): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

lai: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

legend (Latin "requiring to be read"): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the "Arthurian legend" but the "myth of Proserpine."

lexical set: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

litotes (from Greek "smooth"): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: "differences of no slight import" (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, "Sunt Leones," lines 11–12: "And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do" (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

lullaby: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, "Lullaby" (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

lyric (from Greek "lyre"): Initially meaning a song, "lyric" refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus "The Wife's Lament" (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, "The Wild Swans at Coole" (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

masque: a genre. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

metaphor (Greek "carrying across," etymologically parallel to Latin "translation"): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, "London," lines 11–12: "And the hapless Soldier's sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls" (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

meter: Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prosus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms.

Meter (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer**, **dimeter**, **trimeter**, **tetrameter**, **pentameter**, and **hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

metonymy (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

mimesis (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

mise-en-abyme (French for "cast into the abyss"): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called "*mise-en-abyme*." Hoccleve's *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

monometer (Greek "one measure"): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, "most (u) grand (/)" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

myth: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the "Arthurian legend" but the "myth of Proserpine."

novel: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel's openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

novella: a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

occupatio (Latin "taking possession"): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as "praeteritio" (Latin "passing by"). See Chaucer, *Nun's Priest's Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

ode (Greek "song"): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, "An Horatian Ode" (vol. B, p. 1282), or Keats, "Ode on Melancholy" (vol. D, [p. 973](#)). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson's "Ode on Cary and Morison" (vol. B, [pp. 1058–59](#)).

omniscient narrator (Latin "all-knowing narrator"): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, "On the Western Circuit" (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

onomatopoeia (Greek "name making"): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, "Binsey Poplars," lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): "O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!" (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

order: A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in*

medias res (Latin “in the middle of the matter”). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, “A Letter of the Authors” (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French “story”) for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here “narration”) for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

ottava rima: a **verse form**. An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ’s speech from the Cross in Lydgate’s *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

oxymoron (Greek “sharp blunt”): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: “darkness visible” (see vol. B, p. 1431).

panegyric: a **genre**. Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek “showing”), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek “sweet speaking”), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

parable: a **genre**. A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

paradox (Greek “contrary to received opinion”): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song,” line 12: “O sweete harm so quainte” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

parataxis, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

parody: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

pastoral (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepherd’s Calendar* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

pathetic fallacy: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, p. 1406). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

pentameter (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: “O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers” (see vol. B, p. 1433).

performative: Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. “I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison,” if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a “performative.” See also **speech act**.

peripeteia (Greek “turning about”): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

periphrasis (Greek “declaring around”): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

persona (Latin “sound through”): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor’s voice; in literary discourse persona (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

personification, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek “person making”): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” lines 1–2: “Thou still unvanish’d bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time” (see vol. D, [p. 971](#)).

plot: the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

point of view: All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator’s position. In other genres, the narrator’s position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of

a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

protagonist (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

pun: a figure of thought. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

quatrain: a verse form. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, p. 1214).

refrain: usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

register: The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, "the boss"). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

rhetoric: the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

rhyme: a figure of speech. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ ("dead" / "head"). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line ("decays" / "days"). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables ("fountains" / "mountains"). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: "The guests are met, the feast is set" (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: "seeke" / "seke." *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, "They say that Hope is Happiness," lines 5–7: "most" / "lost." *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, "Miners," lines 9–11: "simmer" / "summer" (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

rhyme royal: a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer and called "royal" because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

rhythm: Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek "to flow") denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

romance: a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser's (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

sarcasm (Greek "flesh tearing"): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children" (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).

satire (Latin for "a bowl of mixed fruits"): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt's "Mine Own John Pains" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

satiric mode: Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift's travel narrative *Gulliver's Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** "A Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

scene: a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

sensibility (from Latin, "capable of being perceived by the senses"): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of "sensibility," such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of

which was Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper's passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, p. 1076).

short story: a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

simile (Latin "like"): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word "like" or "as," of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, "The Storm," lines 29–30: "Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail." Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1438).

soliloquy (Latin "single speaking"): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

sonnet: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or "volta," often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt" (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, "London, 1802" (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, "If We Must Die" (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F).

speech act: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

Spenserian stanza: a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, [p. 851](#)), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, [p. 953](#)).

spondee: a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

stanza (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme

scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

story: a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

stream of consciousness: usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

style (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its "tone." We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view**.

sublime: As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

syllable: the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

symbol (Greek "token"): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

synecdoche (Greek "to take with something else"): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, "all hands on deck." Closely related to **metonymy**.

syntax (Greek "ordering with"): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

taste (from Italian "touch"): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

tercet: a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

terza rima: a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, "Mine Own John Pains" (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind" (vol. D, [p. 802](#)); and Morris, "The Defence of Guinevere" (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of "Little Gidding" (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, "Station Island" (vol. F); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, [p. 808](#)).

tetrameter (Greek "four measure"): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: "She stole along, she nothing spoke" (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

theme (Greek "proposition"): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

third-person narration: relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

topographical poem (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

topos (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

tradition (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

tragedy: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

tragic mode: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble

protagonists and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

tragicomedy: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

translation (Latin "carrying across"): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

trimeter (Greek "three measure"): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, "Discipline," line 1: "Throw away thy rod" (see vol. B, p. 1197).

triplet: a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

trochee: a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, "Texas."

type (Greek "impression, figure"): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as "types," or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

unities: According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

vernacular (from Latin *verna*, "servant"): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the "vernacular" languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

verse form: The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

villanelle: a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

wit: Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's

definition of true wit as “Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed” (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

zeugma (Greek “a yoking”): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word “take” is used in two senses: “Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea” (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

B: Publishing History, Censorship

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology’s introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

bookseller: In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul’s Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers’ Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

censorship: The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard "heresy." After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers' Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author's execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

codex: the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

copy text: the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

copyright: the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work's publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

folio: the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the

grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

foul papers: versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

incunabulum (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

manuscript (Latin, "written by hand"): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

paleography (Greek "ancient writing"): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

parchment: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

patronage, patron (Latin "protector"): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

periodical: Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, "day"), periodical writing appears at larger, but still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

printing: Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

publisher: the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers' Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

quire: When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a "gathering" or "signature"). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

royalties: an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

scribe: In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

scriptorium (plural "scriptoria"): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

serial publication: generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

Stationers' Company: The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

subscription: An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

textual criticism: Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

variants: differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

vellum: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

watermark: the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

Endnotes

- Note *: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference *](#)

Geographic Nomenclature

The British Isles refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.**—**Scotland**, **Wales**, and **Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island's other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Ireland**, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire**, **Wiltshire**, **Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain)**, **Caledonia (Scotland)**, and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

The British Empire took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish**, **Scots**, and **Welsh**, as well as by civilians and

servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada**, **Australia**, and **New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth**, **the British Commonwealth**, and "**the Old Commonwealth**" at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Pakistan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.

British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing ($\frac{1}{4}$ penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
21/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
21/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	
1 penny	
1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would

buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875	1950
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.	pint of Guinness stout, 11d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.	pound of beef, 2s. 2d.
	pound of cinnamon, 1 to 3s.	pound of cinnamon, 10s. 6d.	pound of tea, £3 10s.	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French claret, 12s.	pound of tea, 2s.	dinner on railway car, 7s. 6d.
<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.	admission to Old Vic theater, 1s. 6d. to 10s. 6d.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.	admission to Odeon cinema, Manchester, 1s 3d.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" (<i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas	tropical fish tank, £4 4s.
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.

	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.	issue of <i>Eagle</i> comics, 4.5d.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.	Orwell's <i>Nineteen Eighty Four</i> , paperback, 3s. 6d.
transportation	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside, 4 to 5d. a mile	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.	London tube fare, about 2d. a mile
	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)	petrol, 3s. a gallon
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50	midsize Austin sedan, £449 plus £188 4s. 2d. tax
clothes	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard	woman's sundress, £3 13s. 10d.
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.	tweed sports jacket, £3 16s. 6d.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.	"Teddy boy" drape suit, £20
labor/incomes	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week	minimum wage, agricultural laborer, £4 14s. per

							47-hour week
	wage for professional scribe, £2 3s. 4d. a year + cloak	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10 guineas per sheet	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year	shorthand typist, £367 a year
	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year	middle manager's salary, £1,480 a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year	barrister's salary, £2,032 a year

The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about £1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty," princes and princesses as "Your Highness," the other hereditary nobility as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship." Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father's title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward's marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	
Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92 temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though

the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as “gongs”) are granted by the monarch in New Year’s and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain

England

SAXONS AND DANES

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II1016–1016

Canute the Dane1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward1066–1066 (died in battle)

HOUSE OF NORMANDY

William I, the Conqueror 1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I 1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I 1100–1135

HOUSE OF BLOIS

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I 1135–1154

HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I 1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II 1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II 1199–1216

Henry III, son of John 1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III 1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I 1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

HOUSE OF LANCASTER

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed),
1470–1471 (deposed)

HOUSE OF YORK

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III1461–1470 (deposed),
1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback1483–1485 (died in battle)

HOUSE OF TUDOR

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII1547–1553

Mary I, "Bloody," daughter of Henry VIII1553–1558

Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII1558–1603

HOUSE OF STUART

James I (James VI of Scotland)1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I1625–1649 (executed)

COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE

Council of State1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver1658–1660 (resigned)

HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)

Charles II, son of Charles I1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I1685–1688

(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)

HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU

William III of Orange, by
Mary, daughter of Charles I
and Mary II, daughter of James II 1689–1701–1694

Anne, second daughter of James II 1702–1714

Great Britain

HOUSE OF HANOVER

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I 1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II2022–

Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer’s pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the

beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the

Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the "Glorious Revolution" in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious

commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the

nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as "Christian" on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

Volume E: The Victorian Age

General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four*

Continents (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English*.

Literature. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of*

the Novel (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*

(1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible

range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos (https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm and https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at www.mlalrg.org/public) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The*

New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, ed. George Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur

Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the *Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at www.loebclassics.com.

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online. There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

Literary Criticism and Theory

The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism:*

Four Essays (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and '80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and '30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An*

Introduction (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent

studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the*

Race: A New Political History of African American Literature (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen

(2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha

(1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary*

Ecology, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*

(2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

Literary Terminology*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

accent (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

act: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

aesthetics (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending

untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

Alexandrine: a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

a llegory (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

a lliteration (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

allusion: Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

anagnorisis (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

anapest: a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

anaphora (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

a nimal fable: a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

a ntithesis (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1448).

a postrophe (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

apposition: a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases

"heaven-kingdom's Guardian," "the Measurer's might," "his mind-plans," and "the work of the Glory-Father" each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of "praise."

assonance (Latin "sounding to"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," line 100: "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed" (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

aubade (originally from Spanish "alba," dawn): a **genre**. A lover's dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, "The Sun Rising" (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in "Aubade" (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

autobiography (Greek "self-life writing"): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author's path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.

ballad stanza: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See "Sir Patrick Spens" (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett's poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, "This Be The Verse" (vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

ballade: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, "send off"). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

bathos (Greek “depth”): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last” (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

beast epic: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

biography (Greek “life-writing”): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

blank verse: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

blazon: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved’s face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

burlesque (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

caesura (Latin "cut") (plural "caesurae"): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, "Colonization in Reverse," lines 5–8: "By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun" (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

canon (Greek "rule"): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

catastrophe (Greek "overturning"): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

catharsis (Greek "cleansing"): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

character (Greek "stamp, impression"): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the "fuller," or more "rounded," a character is said to be. A "stock" character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

chiasmus (Greek "crosswise"): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, "Eloisa to Abelard," line 104, "The crime was common, common be the pain" (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: "They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide" (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

classical, classicism, classic: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, "classical" primarily describes the

works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. "Classicism" denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. "Classic" denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

climax (Greek "ladder"): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: "Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement" (see vol. B, pp. 1167–68).

comedy: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

comic mode: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

connotation: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term "depression" and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase "the blues."

consonance (Latin "sounding with"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose

vowel sounds are different. Herbert, "Easter," line 13: "Consort, both heart and lute . . ." (see vol. B, p. 1183).

convention: a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

couplet: a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek "two lines") is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: "Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me" (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

dactyl (Greek "finger," because of the finger's three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Oregon."

decorum (Latin "that which is fitting"): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

deixis (Greek "pointing"): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a "here" and a "now" from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "now," "then") are examples of deixis, or "deictics." This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

denotation: A word has a basic, "prosaic" (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word

“steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

denouement (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

dialogue (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

diction, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

didactic mode (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

diegesis (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

dimeter (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Rumming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for

single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, p. 1197).

discourse (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

dramatic irony: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

dramatic monologue (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F).

ecphrasis (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

elegy: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, p. 970).

emblem (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such

interpretation.

end-stopping: the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

enjambment (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

epic (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1427); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, [p. 808](#)). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

epigram: a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, p. 1049).

epigraph (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

epistle (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals.

The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

epitaph: a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

epithalamion (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

epyllion (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

essay (French "trial, attempt"): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

euphemism (Greek "sweet saying"): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, "he passed away").

exegesis (Greek "leading out"): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

exemplum (Latin "example"): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

fabliau (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

farce (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

figures of speech: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

figures of thought: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

first-person narration: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

frame narrative: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

free indirect style: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often

implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

genre and mode: The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

georgic (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

hermeneutics (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

heroic poetry: see **epic**.

hexameter (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a

Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

homily (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

homophone (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

hyperbaton (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1430).

hyperbole (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1273); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

hypermetrical (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

hypotaxis, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a

single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: “As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river’s mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he” (vol. B, p. 1588). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

iamb: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, “Vermont.”

imitation: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

irony (Greek “dissimulation”): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. “It’s a beautiful day” is unironic if it’s a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

journal (French “daily”): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

lai: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

legend (Latin “requiring to be read”): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

lexical set: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

litotes (from Greek “smooth”): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: “differences of no slight import” (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, “Sunt Leones,” lines 11–12: “And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do” (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

lullaby: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, “Lullaby” (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

lyric (from Greek “lyre”): Initially meaning a song, “lyric” refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus “The Wife’s Lament” (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole” (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

masque: a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

metaphor (Greek “carrying across,” etymologically parallel to Latin “translation”): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, “London,” lines 11–12: “And the hapless Soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls” (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

meter: Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

metonymy (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

mimesis (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

mise-en-abyme (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

monometer (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

myth: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

novel: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel’s openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

novella: a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

occupatio (Latin “taking possession”): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as “praeteritio” (Latin “passing by”). See Chaucer, *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

ode (Greek “song”): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, “An Horatian Ode” (vol. B, p. 1282), or Keats, “Ode on Melancholy” (vol. D, p. 973). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson’s “Ode on Cary and Morison” (vol. B, pp. 1058–59).

omniscient narrator (Latin “all-knowing narrator”): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, “On the Western Circuit” (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

onomatopoeia (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

order: A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the

sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin “in the middle of the matter”). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, “A Letter of the Authors” (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French “story”) for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here “narration”) for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

ottava rima: a verse form. An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ’s speech from the Cross in Lydgate’s *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

oxymoron (Greek “sharp blunt”): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: “darkness visible” (see vol. B, p. 1431).

panegyric: a genre. Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek “showing”), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek “sweet speaking”), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

parable: a genre. A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

paradox (Greek “contrary to received opinion”): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal

an inner consistency. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song," line 12: "O sweete harm so quaint" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

parataxis, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering beside"): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: "So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy" (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

parody: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

pastoral (from Latin *pastor*, "shepherd"): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil's *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for "herdsman"). Thus Spenser, *Shepherd's Calendar* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

pathetic fallacy: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: "With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears" (see vol. B, p. 1406). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), "Of the Pathetic Fallacy" (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

pentameter (Greek "five measure"): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the

nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: "O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers" (see vol. B, p. 1433).

performative: Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a "performative." See also **speech act**.

peripeteia (Greek "turning about"): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

periphrasis (Greek "declaring around"): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

persona (Latin "sound through"): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor's voice; in literary discourse persona (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

personification, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, p. 971).

plot: the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct

them from the plot. See also **order**.

point of view: All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

protagonist (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

pun: a **figure of thought**. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

quatrain: a **verse form**. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, p. 1214).

refrain: usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

register: The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society

(for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, "the boss"). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

rhetoric: the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

rhyme: a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ ("dead" / "head"). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line ("decays" / "days"). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables ("fountains" / "mountains"). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: "The guests are met, the feast is set" (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: "seeke" / "seke." *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, "They say that Hope is Happiness," lines 5–7: "most" / "lost." *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, "Miners," lines 9–11: "simmer" / "summer" (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

rhyme royal: a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer and called "royal" because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

rhythm: Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek "to flow") denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

romance: a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser's (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

sarcasm (Greek "flesh tearing"): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the

epic poem *Fingal*] replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children" (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).

satire (Latin for "a bowl of mixed fruits"): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt's "Mine Own John Pains" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

satiric mode: Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift's travel narrative *Gulliver's Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** "A Modest Proposal" (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

scene: a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

sensibility (from Latin, "capable of being perceived by the senses"): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of "sensibility," such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe's *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper's passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, p. 1076).

short story: a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a

collection. Thus Mansfield, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

simile (Latin "like"): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word "like" or "as," of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, "The Storm," lines 29–30: "Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail." Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1438).

soliloquy (Latin "single speaking"): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

sonnet: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or "volta," often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt" (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, "London, 1802" (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, "If We Must Die" (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, p. 970).

speech act: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

Spenserian stanza: a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, [p. 851](#)), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, [p. 953](#)).

spondee: a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

stanza (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

story: a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

stream of consciousness: usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

style (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of

the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its "tone." We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

sublime: As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

syllable: the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

symbol (Greek "token"): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

synecdoche (Greek "to take with something else"): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, "all hands on deck." Closely related to **metonymy**.

syntax (Greek "ordering with"): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the

overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

taste (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

tercet: a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

terza rima: a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, [p. 802](#)); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F, p. 968); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, [p. 801](#)).

tetrameter (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

theme (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that

unifies a given work of literature.

third-person narration: relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

topographical poem (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

topos (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

tradition (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

tragedy: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieus. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

tragic mode: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

tragicomedy: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

translation (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

trimeter (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, p. 1197).

triplet: a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

trochee: a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

type (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

unities: According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

vernacular (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and

literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

verse form: The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

villanelle: a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

wit: Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's definition of true wit as "Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

zeugma (Greek "a yoking"): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word "take" is used in two senses: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)).

B: Publishing History, Censorship

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

bookseller: In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

censorship: The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

codex: the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

copy text: the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

copyright: the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work's publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

folio: the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

foul papers: versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

incunabulum (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

manuscript (Latin, “written by hand”): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

paleography (Greek “ancient writing”): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

parchment: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

patronage, patron (Latin “protector”): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

periodical: Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, “day”), periodical writing appears at larger, but still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

printing: Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

publisher: the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers’ Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

quire: When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a “gathering” or “signature”). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

royalties: an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

scribe: In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

scriptorium (plural “scriptoria”): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

serial publication: generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

Stationers' Company: The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

subscription: An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

textual criticism: Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

variants: differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

vellum: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

watermark: the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

Endnotes

- Note *: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference *](#)

Geographic Nomenclature

The British Isles refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

Britain. Ireland, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

The British Empire took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth**, and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.

British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing (1/4 penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
2 1/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
2 1/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	

1 penny	
1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU's common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons' strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom's budget for the day depicted in Joyce's novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	"drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence" (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1	pound of cinnamon,	pound of tea, £3	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French	pound of tea, 2s.

	to 3s.	10s. 6d.	10s.		claret, 12s.	
<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" (<i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside,	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

					4 to 5d. a mile	
	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	3s. 4d. a year + cloak				guineas per sheet	
	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year

The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty," princes and princesses as "Your Highness," the other hereditary nobility as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship." Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father's title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward's marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	

Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92

temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the "Law Lords").

Below the peerage the chief title of honor is "knight." Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as "Sir John"; his wife, using the last name, is "Lady Black"—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be "Lady Arabella." The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of "Dame." Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as "gongs") are granted by the monarch in New Year's and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain

England

SAXONS AND DANES

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II1016–1016

Canute the Dane1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward1066–1066 (died in battle)

HOUSE OF NORMANDY

William I, the Conqueror1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I1100–1135

HOUSE OF BLOIS

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I1135–1154

HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II1199–1216

Henry III, son of John1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

HOUSE OF LANCASTER

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed),
1470–1471 (deposed)

HOUSE OF YORK

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III 1461–1470
(deposed),
1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV 1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback 1483–1485 (died in battle)

HOUSE OF TUDOR

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV 1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII 1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII 1547–1553

Mary I, "Bloody," daughter of Henry VIII 1553–1558

Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII 1558–1603

HOUSE OF STUART

James I (James VI of Scotland)1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I1625–1649 (executed)

COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE

Council of State1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver1658–1660 (resigned)

HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)

Charles II, son of Charles I1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I1685–1688

(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)

HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU

William III of Orange, by

Mary, daughter of Charles I1689–1701

and Mary II, daughter of James II –1694

Anne, second daughter of James II1702–1714

Great Britain

HOUSE OF HANOVER

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI 1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II 2022–

Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a

community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that

marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own

lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring

the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to

Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from

voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots

Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as “Christian” on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

APPENDICES

General Bibliography

This bibliography consists of a list of suggested general readings on English literature. Bibliographies for the authors and topical clusters in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* are available online at the NAEL student site.

Histories of England and of English Literature

Even the most distinguished of the comprehensive general histories written in past generations have come to seem outmoded. Innovative research in social, cultural, and political history has made it difficult to write a single coherent account of England from the Middle Ages to the present, let alone to accommodate in a unified narrative the complex histories of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and the other nations where writing in English has flourished. Readers who wish to explore the historical matrix out of which the works of literature collected in this anthology emerged are advised to consult the studies of particular periods listed in the appropriate sections of this bibliography. The multivolume *Oxford History of England* (1934–65) and *New Oxford History of England* (1992–2009) are useful, as are the three-volume *Peoples of the British Isles: A New History*, by Stanford E. Lehmberg, Samantha A. Meigs, and Thomas William Heyck (3rd ed., 1992); the nine-volume *Cambridge Cultural History of Britain*, ed. Boris Ford (1992); the three-volume *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950*, ed. F. M. L. Thompson (1990); and the multivolume *Penguin History of Britain*, gen. ed. David Cannadine (1996–). For Britain's imperial history, readers can consult the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. Wm. Roger Louis (1998–99), as well as *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (2004). Also of interest is Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four*

Continents (2015). Given the cultural centrality of London, readers may find particular interest in *The London Encyclopaedia*, ed. Ben Weinreb et al. (3rd ed., 2008); Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (1994); and Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: "A Human Awful Wonder of God"* (2007) and *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People* (2001).

Similar observations may be made about literary history. In the light of such initiatives as women's studies, New Historicism, and postcolonialism, the range of authors deemed significant has expanded, along with the geographical and conceptual boundaries of literature in English. Attempts to capture in a unified account the great sweep of literature from *Beowulf* to the early twenty-first century have largely given way to studies of individual genres, carefully delimited time periods, and specific authors. Among the large-scale literary surveys, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, ed. Dominic Head (3rd ed., 2006), is useful, as is the nine-volume *Penguin History of Literature* (1987–94) and the multivolume *Oxford History of Poetry in English* (2022–). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Virginia Blain, Isobel Grundy, and Patricia Clements (1990), is an important resource, and the editorial materials in the two-volume *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (3rd ed., 2007), constitute a concise history and set of biographies of women authors since the Middle Ages. *Annals of English Literature, 1475–1950* (2nd ed., 1961), lists important publications year by year, together with the significant literary events for each year. Seven volumes have been published in *The Oxford English Literary History*, gen. eds. Jonathan Bate and Colin Burrow (2002–): Laura Ashe, *1000–1350: Conquest and Transformation*; James Simpson, *1350–1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*; Margaret J. M. Ezell, *1645–1714: The Later Seventeenth Century*; Philip Davis, *1830–1880: The Victorians*; Chris Baldick, *1830–1880: The Modern Movement (1910–1940)*; Randall Stevenson, *1960–2000: The Last of England?*; and Bruce King, *1948–2000: The Internationalization of English*

Literature. See also *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (1999); *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare E. Lees (2013); *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (2002); *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660–1780*, ed. John Richetti (2005); *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (2009); *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (2012); and *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (2004).

Helpful treatments and surveys of English meter, rhyme, and stanza forms are Paul Fussell Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (rev. ed., 1979); Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (1980); Charles O. Hartman, *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody* (1980); Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995); Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1998); *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (2000); John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (3rd ed., 2001); *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, ed. Helen Vendler (3rd ed., 2010); *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (2014); and Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (2015).

On the development and functioning of the novel as a form, see Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1970; trans. 1980); *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (2000); *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (2 vols.; 2001–03, trans. 2006); McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (15th anniversary ed., 2002); *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (2012); *A Companion to the English Novel*, ed. Stephen Arata et al. (2015); and the ten volumes to date of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2012–). On women novelists and readers, see Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of*

the Novel (1987), and Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (1994).

On the history of playhouse design, see Richard Leacroft, *The Development of the English Playhouse: An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Medieval to Modern Times* (1988). For a survey of the plays that have appeared on these and other stages, see Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama*, rev. J. C. Trewin (6th ed., 1978); the eight-volume *The Revels History of Drama in English*, gen. eds. Clifford Leech and T. W. Craik (1975–83); Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (3rd ed., 1989); and the three volumes of *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling, Peter Thomson, Joseph Donohue, and Baz Kershaw (2004).

On some of the key intellectual currents that are at once reflected in and shaped by literature and contemporary literary criticism, Arthur O. Lovejoy's classic studies *The Great Chain of Being* (1936) and *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948) remain valuable, along with such works as Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900; trans. 1907; 3rd enl. ed., 2004); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (4 vols., 1923–95; trans. 1953–96); Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (2 vols., 1939; trans. 1979–82); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (2 vols., 1949; trans. 1953, new trans. 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952; trans. 1957, new trans. 2008); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; new eds. 1997, 2016); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; 2nd ed., 1998); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958; trans. 1969, new ed. 1994); Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (1960; rev. ed., 1964; rev. and expanded as *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, 2003); Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966; trans. 1983); M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*

(1971); Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1964; trans. 1965) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; trans. 1970); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; trans. 1976, 40th anniversary ed. 2016) and *Dissemination* (1972; trans. 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973); Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973; trans. 1975); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976; new ed., 2015); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979; trans. 1984); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979; 39th anniversary ed., 2009); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980; trans. 1987); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2 vols., 1980; trans. 1984–98); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1985; trans. 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997); Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (1997); and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999).

Reference Works

The single most important tool for the study of literature in English is the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1884–1924; 2nd ed., 1989; 3rd ed. in process). The most current edition, updated quarterly, is available online to subscribers. The *OED* is written on historical principles: that is, it attempts not only to describe current word use but also to record the history and development of the language from its origins before the Norman Conquest to the present. It thus provides, for familiar as well as archaic and obscure words, the widest possible

range of meanings and uses, organized chronologically and illustrated with quotations. The *OED* can be searched as a conventional dictionary arranged a–z and also by subject, usage, region, origin, and timeline (the first appearance of a word). Resources available for early forms of English include the online Old English and Middle English dictionaries at Lexilogos (https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_old.htm and https://www.lexilogos.com/english/english_middle.htm); also valuable are the *Dictionary of Old English* (1986–) and the *Middle English Dictionary* (1952; digitized 2008). Beyond the *OED* there are many other valuable dictionaries, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed., 50th anniversary printing, 2018); *The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations* (1992); T. F. Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1993); Bas Aarts, Sylvia Chalker, and Edmund Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (2nd ed., 2014); Morton S. Freeman, *A New Dictionary of Eponyms* (1997); *The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English* (1999); *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms*, ed. Judith Siefring (2nd ed., 2004); P. H. Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* (3rd ed., 2014); Tom McArthur, *The Oxford Guide to World English* (2002); and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, ed. Jennifer Speake (4th ed., 2003). Other valuable reference works include *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, ed. David Crystal (3rd ed., 2018); *The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (1998); *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. Jeremy Butterfield (3rd ed., 2016); and the numerous guides to specialized vocabularies, slang, regional dialects, and the like.

There is a steady flow of new editions of most major and many minor writers in English, along with the publication of critical appraisals and scholarship. James L. Harner's *Literary Research Guide: An Annotated List of Reference Sources in English Literary Studies* (6th ed., 2014; available online at www.mlalrg.org/public) offers thorough, evaluative annotations of a wide range of sources. For the historical record of scholarship and critical discussion, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. George

Watson (5 vols., 1969–77), and the third edition in process, *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, ed. Joanne Shattock (1 vol. to date, 2000–), are useful. The *MLA International Bibliography* (also online) is a key resource for following critical discussion of literatures in English. Ranging from 1926 to the present, it includes journal articles, essays, chapters from collections, books, and dissertations, and covers folklore, linguistics, and film. The *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature* (ABELL), compiled by the Modern Humanities Research Association, lists monographs, periodical articles, critical editions of literary works, book reviews, and collections of essays published anywhere in the world; unpublished doctoral dissertations are covered for the period 1920–99 (available online to subscribers directly and as part of Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>).

For compact biographies of English authors, see the multivolume *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (2004); since 2004 the DNB has been extended online with updates (now monthly). Handy reference books of authors, works, and various literary terms and allusions include many volumes in the *Cambridge Companion* and *Oxford Companion* series: e.g., *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (2007); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. Dinah Birch (7th ed., 2009); and *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter Struck (2010). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, editor-in-chief Roland Greene (4th ed., 2012), is available online to subscribers in Oxford Reference. Handbooks that define and illustrate literary concepts and terms include *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. J. A. Cuddon and M. A. R. Habib (5th ed., 2015); William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature* (12th ed., 2011); *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (2nd ed., 1995); and M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (11th ed., 2014). Also useful are Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed., 1991); Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (1982); the

Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (1995); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (1994).

On Greek and Roman backgrounds, see *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*—vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and Bernard M. W. Knox (1985), and vol. 2, *Latin Literature*, ed. E. J. Kenney and W. V. Clausen (1982), both available to subscribers online; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M. C. Howatson (3rd ed., 2011); Gian Biagio Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (1987; trans. 1994); *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (4th ed., 2012); Richard Rutherford, *Classical Literature: A Concise History* (2005); and Mark P. O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology* (11th ed., 2018). The Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Roman texts with facing-page English translations is now available online to subscribers at www.loebclassics.com.

Digital resources in the humanities continue to grow rapidly. Among the many useful electronic resources for the study of English literature are enormous digital archives, available to subscribers: Early English Books Online (EEBO), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>; Literature Online, <http://literature.proquest.com/marketing/index.jsp>; and Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), www.gale.com/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online. There are also numerous free sites of variable quality. Many of the best of these are period- or author-specific and hence are listed in the period/author bibliographies on the NAEL website. Among the general sites, one of the most useful and wide-ranging is Voice of the Shuttle (<http://vos.ucsb.edu>), which includes links to Bartleby.com and Project Gutenberg.

Literary Criticism and Theory

The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism comprises nine volumes (1989–2013): *Classical Criticism*, ed. George A. Kennedy; *The Middle*

Ages, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson; *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton; *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; *Romanticism*, ed. Marshall Brown; *The Nineteenth Century, c. 1830–1914*, ed. M. A. R. Habib; *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey; *From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. Raman Selden; and *Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris. See also M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953); William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957); René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950* (8 vols., 1955–92); Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (1980); J. Hillis Miller, *On Literature* (2002); and John Frow, *Character and Person* (2014). Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker have written *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (6th ed., 2017). Other useful resources include *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman (2nd ed., 2005); *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, gen. ed. Vincent B. Leitch (3rd ed., 2018).

Modern approaches to English literature and literary theory were shaped by certain landmark works: William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; 3rd ed., 1953), *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), and *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; 3rd ed., 1977); T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; 3rd ed., 1951) and *On Poetry and Poets* (1957); F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936) and *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948); Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946; trans. 1953); Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950); William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 2nd ed., 1983); and W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and*

the English Poet (1970). René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed., 1963), is a useful introduction to the variety of scholarly and critical approaches to literature up to the time of its publication. Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2nd ed., 2011), discusses recurrent issues and debates. On the discipline of criticism, see John Guillory's *Professing Criticism: Essays on the Organization of Literary Study* (2022); Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) is a critical assessment of contemporary criticism.

Beginning in the late 1960s, interest in literary theory as a specific field markedly intensified. Certain forms of literary study had already been influenced by the work of the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson and the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky—and, still more, by conceptions that derived or claimed to derive from Marx and Engels—but the full impact of these theories was not felt until what became known as the “theory revolution” of the 1970s and '80s. For Marxist literary criticism, see Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1920; trans. 1971), *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962), and *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of the Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki, and Others* (trans. 1950); Walter Benjamin's essays from the 1920s and '30s, represented in *Illuminations* (1955; trans. 1968) and *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (1975; trans. 1978); Mikhail Bakhtin's essays from the 1930s represented in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (trans. 1981) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. 1968); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (1977); Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (1979; 2nd ed., 2003); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983; anniversary ed., 2008) and *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990).

Structural linguistics and anthropology gave rise to a flowering of structuralist literary criticism; convenient introductions include Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (1974), and Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (new ed., 2002). Poststructuralist challenges to this approach are epitomized in such influential works as Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967; trans. 1978), and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (1971; 2nd ed., 1983). Poststructuralism is discussed in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982; 25th anniversary ed., 2007); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991); John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (1991); and *Beyond Structuralism: The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*, ed. Wendell V. Harris (1996). A figure who greatly influenced both structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1957; trans. 1972, new trans. 2012) and *S/Z* (1970; trans. 1974). Among other influential contributions to literary theory are the psychoanalytic approach in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973; 2nd ed., 1997), and the reader-response approach in Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980). For a retrospect on these decades, see Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (2003).

Influenced by these theoretical currents but not restricted to them, modern feminist literary criticism was fashioned by such works as Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976; new ed., 1986); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977; expanded ed., 1999); and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). Subsequent studies include Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1982); Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*

(1977; trans. 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987; new ed., 2006); Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (3 vols., 1988–94); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 2nd ed., 1999); and the critical views sampled in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (1985); *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Mary Eagleton (1986; 3rd ed., 2011); and *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (1991; rev. in 2009 as *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*); *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (2006); and *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2007).

Just as feminist critics used poststructuralist and psychoanalytic methods to place literature in conversation with gender theory, a new school emerged placing literature in conversation with critical race theory. Comprehensive introductions include *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995); and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed., 2017); and *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (2nd ed., 2021). For an important precursor in cultural studies, see Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (1978; 2nd ed., 2013). Seminal works include Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988; 25th anniversary ed., 2014); Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (1993; 25th anniversary ed., 2017); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (2011); Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (2017); and Saidiya V. Hartman,

Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval (2019). Other important works include Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (2008; rpt. 2017); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016); and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018). Helpful anthologies and collections of essays have emerged in recent decades, such as *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (1997), and also their *Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (2001); *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (1996; updated 2003); *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer (2003); *A Companion to African American Literature*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett (2010); *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, ed. Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell (2011); *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*, ed. Suzanne Bost and Frances R. Aparicio (2013); *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (2014); *The Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. Crystal Parikh and Daniel Y. Kim (2015); and *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature, 1945–2010*, ed. Deirdre Osborne (2016).

Gay literature and queer studies are represented in collections including *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (1991); *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (1993); *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Byrne R. S. Fone (1998); *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2014); and *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. Jodie Medd (2015), and by such books as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1985; 30th anniversary ed., 2015) and *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990; updated ed., 2008); Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (1989); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (1993); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995); Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998); David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Brian Glavey, *The Wallflower Avant-garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis* (2016).

New Historicism is represented in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (1990; new ed., 2007); *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (1993); *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (1994); and Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (2000). The related social and historical dimension of texts is discussed in Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), and *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (1995). Characteristic of New Historicism is an expansion of the field of literary interpretation still further in cultural studies; for a broad sampling of the range of interests, see *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (1992); *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (1995); and *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (3rd ed., 2007).

This expansion of the field is similarly reflected in postcolonial studies: see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (cited above) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; trans. 1963, 60th anniversary ed. 2021); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (1990); *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006); and such influential books

as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989; 2nd ed., 2002); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; new ed., 2004); Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995; 2nd ed., 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000; new ed., 2008); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001; anniversary ed., 2016). Useful collections include *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson (2 vols., 2011–12); *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel*, ed. Ato Quayson (2016); and *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*, ed. Jahan Ramazani (2017).

In the wake of the theory revolution, critics have focused on a wide array of topics, which can be only briefly surveyed here. One current of work, focusing on the history of emotion, is represented in Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (2005); *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010); and Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (2015). A somewhat related current, examining the special role of traumatic memory in literature, is exemplified in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (1995), and Dominic LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001; new ed., 2014). Work on the literary implications of cognitive science may be glimpsed in *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (2010). Interest in quantitative approaches to literature was sparked by Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2005). For the field of digital humanities, see Moretti, *Distant Reading* (2013); *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Terras, Julianne Nyhan, and Edward Vanhoutte (2013); and *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth (2016). For ecocriticism, or studies of literature and the environment, see *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (1996); *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and

Neil Sammells (1998); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (2000); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005); Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011); *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (2014); and *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, ed. Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor (2017). Related are the fields of animal studies and posthumanism, whose key works include Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991; trans. 1993); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (2000); Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (2003) and *What Is Posthumanism?* (2009); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2006; trans. 2008); Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (2012); *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (2012); and *Critical Animal Studies: Thinking the Unthinkable*, ed. John Sorenson (2014). The relationship between literature and law is central to such works as *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader*, ed. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux (1988); *Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law*, ed. Peter Brooks and Paul Gewirtz (1996); *Literature and Legal Problem Solving: Law and Literature as Ethical Discourse*, ed. Paul J. Heald (1998); and *New Directions in Law and Literature*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Bernadette Meyler (2017). Ethical questions in literature have been usefully explored by, among others, Geoffrey Galt Harpham in *Getting It Right: Language, Literature, and Ethics* (1992) and Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Finally, some approaches to literature, such as formalism and literary biography, that seemed superseded in the theoretical ferment of the late twentieth century have had a resurgence. A renewed interest in form is evident in Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); *Reading for Form*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (2006); and Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy,*

Network (2015). Interest in the history of the book was spearheaded by D. F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986), Jerome J. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), and Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992; trans. 1994). See also *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (1996); *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (7 vols., 1999–2019); *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2nd ed., 2006); and *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Leslie Howsam (2015). For studies in new media and digital or electronic literature, see N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (2008); Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (2016); and Jessica Pressman's *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (2020).

Anthologies representing a range of recent approaches include *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (2nd ed., 2000); *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (4th ed., 1998); and *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (cited above).

Literary Terminology*

Using simple technical terms can sharpen our understanding and streamline our discussion of literary works. Some terms, such as the ones in section A, below, help us address the internal style, structure, form, and kind of works. Other terms, such as those in section B, provide insight into the material forms in which literary works have been produced.

In analyzing what they called “rhetoric,” ancient Greek and Roman writers determined the elements of what we call “style” and “structure.” Most of our literary terms are derived, via medieval and Renaissance intermediaries, from the Greek and Latin sources. In the definitions that follow, the etymology, or root, of the word is given when it helps illuminate the word’s current usage.

Many of the examples are drawn from texts in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

Words **boldfaced** within definitions are themselves defined in this appendix. Some terms are defined within definitions; such words are *italicized*.

A. Terms of Style, Structure, Form, and Kind

accent (synonym “stress”): a term of **rhythm**. The special force devoted to the voicing of one syllable in a word over others. In the noun “accent,” for example, the accent, or stress, is on the first syllable.

act: the major subdivision of a play, usually divided into **scenes**.

aesthetics (from Greek, “to feel, apprehend by the senses”): the philosophy of artistic meaning as a distinct mode of apprehending

untranslatable truth, defined as an alternative to rational enquiry, which is purely abstract. Developed in the late eighteenth century by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant especially.

Alexandrine: a term of **meter**. In French verse a line of twelve syllables, and, by analogy, in English verse a line of six stresses. See **hexameter**.

a llegory (Greek "saying otherwise"): saying one thing (the "vehicle" of the allegory) and meaning another (the allegory's "tenor"). Allegories may be momentary aspects of a work, as in **metaphor** ("John is a lion"), or, through extended metaphor, may constitute the basis of narrative, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: this second meaning is the dominant one. See also **symbol** and **type**. Allegory is one of the most significant **figures of thought**.

a lliteration (from Latin "litera," alphabetic letter): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of an initial consonant sound or consonant cluster in consecutive or closely positioned words. This pattern is often an inseparable part of the meter in Germanic languages, where the tonic, or accented **syllable**, is usually the first syllable. Thus all Old English poetry and some varieties of Middle English poetry use alliteration as part of their basic metrical practice. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 1: "Once the siege and assault of Troy had ceased" (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)). Otherwise used for local effects; Stevie Smith, "Pretty," lines 4–5: "And in the pretty pool the pike stalks / He stalks his prey . . ." (see vol. F, [p. 589](#)).

allusion: Literary allusion is a passing but illuminating reference within a literary text to another, well-known text (often biblical or **classical**). Topical allusions are also, of course, common in certain modes, especially **satire**.

anagnorisis (Greek "recognition"): the moment of **protagonist's** recognition in a narrative, which is also often the moment of moral understanding.

anapest: a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two unstressed (uu) syllables followed by one stressed (/). Thus, for example, "Illinois."

anaphora (Greek "carrying back"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of words or groups of words at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or phrases. Blake, "London," lines 5–8: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban . . ." (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)); Louise Bennett, "Jamaica Oman," lines 17–20: "Some backa man a push, some side-a / Man a hole him han, / Some a lick sense eena him head, / Some a guide him pon him plan!" (see vol. F, [p. 724](#)).

a nimal fable: a **genre**. A short narrative of speaking animals, followed by moralizing comment, written in a low style and gathered into a collection. Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Jasper" (see vol. A, [p. 679](#)).

a ntithesis (Greek "placing against"): a **figure of thought**. The juxtaposition of opposed terms in clauses or sentences that are next to or near each other. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.777–80: "They but now who seemed / In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons / Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room / Throng numberless" (see vol. B, p. 1448).

a postrophe (from Greek "turning away"): a **figure of thought**. An address, often to an absent person, a force, or a quality. For example, a poet makes an apostrophe to a Muse when invoking her for inspiration.

apposition: a term of **syntax**. The repetition of elements serving an identical grammatical function in one sentence. The effect of this repetition is to arrest the flow of the sentence, but in doing so to add extra semantic nuance to repeated elements. This is an especially important feature of Old English poetic style. See, for example, Caedmon's *Hymn* (vol. A, [p. 31](#)), where the phrases

"heaven-kingdom's Guardian," "the Measurer's might," "his mind-plans," and "the work of the Glory-Father" each serve an identical syntactic function as the direct objects of "praise."

assonance (Latin "sounding to"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical or near identical stressed vowel sounds in words whose final consonants differ, producing half-rhyme. Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott," line 100: "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed" (see vol. E, [p. 210](#)).

aubade (originally from Spanish "alba," dawn): a **genre**. A lover's dawn song or lyric bewailing the arrival of the day and the necessary separation of the lovers; Donne, "The Sun Rising" (see vol. B, [p. 888](#)). Larkin recasts the genre in "Aubade" (see vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

autobiography (Greek "self-life writing"): a **genre**. A narrative of a life written by the subject; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)). There are subgenres, such as the spiritual autobiography, narrating the author's path to conversion and subsequent spiritual trials, as in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*.

ballad stanza: a **verse form**. Usually a **quatrain** in alternating **iambic tetrameter** and **iambic trimeter** lines, rhyming abcb. See "Sir Patrick Spens" (vol. D, [p. 38](#)); Louise Bennett's poems (vol. F, [pp. 719–24](#)); Eliot, "Sweeney among the Nightingales" (vol. F, [p. 501](#)); Larkin, "This Be The Verse" (vol. F, [p. 795](#)).

ballade: a **verse form**. A form consisting usually of three stanzas followed by a four-line envoi (French, "send off"). The last line of the first stanza establishes a **refrain**, which is repeated, or subtly varied, as the last line of each stanza. The form was derived from French medieval poetry; English poets, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries especially, used it with varying stanza forms. Chaucer, "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (see vol. A, [p. 575](#)).

bathos (Greek “depth”): a **figure of thought**. A sudden and sometimes ridiculous descent of tone; Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* 3.157–58: “Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, / When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last” (see vol. C, [p. 549](#)).

beast epic: a **genre**. A continuous, unmoralized narrative, in prose or verse, relating the victories of the wholly unscrupulous but brilliant strategist Reynard the Fox over all adversaries. Chaucer arouses, only to deflate, expectations of the genre in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 556](#)).

biography (Greek “life-writing”): a **genre**. A life as the subject of an extended narrative.

blank verse: a **verse form**. Unrhymed **iambic pentameter** lines. Blank verse has no stanzas, but is broken up into uneven units (verse paragraphs) determined by sense rather than form. First devised in English by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in his translation of two books of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this very flexible verse type became the standard form for dramatic poetry in the seventeenth century, as in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Milton and Wordsworth, among many others, also used it to create an English equivalent to **classical epic**.

blazon: strictly, a heraldic shield; in rhetorical usage, a **topos** whereby the individual elements of a beloved’s face and body are singled out for **hyperbolic** admiration. Spenser, *Epithalamion*, lines 167–84 (see vol. B, [p. 459](#)). For an inversion of the **topos**, see Shakespeare, Sonnet 130 (vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

burlesque (French and Italian “mocking”): a work that adopts the **conventions** of a genre with the aim less of comically mocking the genre than of satirically mocking the society so represented (see **satire**). Thus Pope’s *Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)) does not mock **classical epic** so much as contemporary mores.

caesura (Latin “cut”) (plural “caesurae”): a term of **meter**. A pause or breathing space within a line of verse, generally occurring between syntactic units; Louise Bennett, “Colonization in Reverse,” lines 5–8: “By de hundred, by de tousan, / From country an from town, / By de ship-load, by de plane-load, / Jamaica is Englan boun” (see vol. F, [p. 722](#)), where the caesurae occur in lines 5 and 7.

canon (Greek “rule”): the group of texts regarded as worthy of special respect or attention by a given institution. Also, the group of texts regarded as definitely having been written by a certain author.

catastrophe (Greek “overturning”): the decisive turn in **tragedy** by which the plot is resolved and, usually, the **protagonist** dies.

catharsis (Greek “cleansing”): According to Aristotle, the effect of **tragedy** on its audience, through their experience of pity and terror, was a kind of spiritual cleansing, or catharsis.

character (Greek “stamp, impression”): a person, personified animal, or other figure represented in a literary work, especially in narrative and drama. The more a character seems to generate the action of a narrative, and the less he or she seems merely to serve a preordained narrative pattern, the “fuller,” or more “rounded,” a character is said to be. A “stock” character, common particularly in many comic genres, will perform a predictable function in different works of a given genre.

chiasmus (Greek “crosswise”): a **figure of speech**. The inversion of an already established sequence. This can involve verbal echoes: Pope, “Eloisa to Abelard,” line 104, “The crime was common, common be the pain” (see vol. C, [p. 560](#)); or it can be purely a matter of syntactic inversion: Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, line 8: “They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide” (see vol. C, [p. 575](#)).

classical, classicism, classic: Each term can be widely applied, but in English literary discourse, “classical” primarily describes the

works of either Greek or Roman antiquity. "Classicism" denotes the practice of art forms inspired by classical antiquity, in particular the observance of rhetorical norms of **decorum** and balance, as opposed to following the dictates of untutored inspiration, as in Romanticism. "Classic" denotes an especially famous work within a given **canon**.

climax (Greek "ladder"): a moment of great intensity and structural change, especially in drama. Also a **figure of speech** whereby a sequence of verbally linked clauses is made, in which each successive clause is of greater consequence than its predecessor. Bacon, *Of Studies*: "Studies serve for pastimes, for ornaments, and for abilities. Their chief use for pastimes is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in judgement" (see vol. B, [pp. 1167–68](#)).

comedy: a **genre**. A term primarily applied to drama, and derived from ancient drama, in opposition to **tragedy**. Comedy deals with humorously confusing, sometimes ridiculous situations in which the ending is, nevertheless, happy. A comedy often ends in one or more marriages.

comic mode: Many genres (for example, **romance**, **fabliau**, **comedy**) involve a happy ending in which justice is done, the ravages of time are arrested, and that which is lost is found. Such genres participate in a comic mode.

connotation: To understand connotation, we need to understand **denotation**. While many words can denote the same concept—that is, have the same basic meaning—those words can evoke different associations, or connotations. Contrast, for example, the clinical-sounding term "depression" and the more colorful, musical, even poetic phrase "the blues."

consonance (Latin "sounding with"): a **figure of speech**. The repetition of final consonants in words or stressed syllables whose

vowel sounds are different. Herbert, "Easter," line 13: "Consort, both heart and lute . . ." (see vol. B, [p. 1183](#)).

convention: a repeatedly recurring feature (in either form or content) of works, occurring in combination with other recurring formal features, which constitutes a convention of a particular genre.

couplet: a **verse form**. In English verse two consecutive, rhyming lines usually containing the same number of stresses. Chaucer first introduced the **iambic pentameter** couplet into English (*Canterbury Tales*); the form was later used in many types of writing, including drama; imitations and translations of **classical epic** (thus *heroic couplet*); essays; and **satire** (see Dryden and Pope). The *distich* (Greek "two lines") is a couplet usually making complete sense; Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, lines 5–6: "Read it fair queen, though it defective be, / Your excellence can grace both it and me" (see vol. B, [p. 925](#)).

dactyl (Greek "finger," because of the finger's three joints): a term of **rhythm**. A three-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Oregon."

decorum (Latin "that which is fitting"): a rhetorical principle whereby each formal aspect of a work should be in keeping with its subject matter and/or audience.

deixis (Greek "pointing"): relevant to **point of view**. Every work has, implicitly or explicitly, a "here" and a "now" from which it is narrated. Words that refer to or imply this point from which the voice of the work is projected (such as "here," "there," "this," "that," "now," "then") are examples of deixis, or "deictics." This technique is especially important in drama, where it is used to create a sense of the events happening as the spectator witnesses them.

denotation: A word has a basic, "prosaic" (factual) meaning prior to the associations it connotes (see **connotation**). The word

“steed,” for example, might call to mind a horse fitted with battle gear, to be ridden by a warrior, but its denotation is simply “horse.”

d enouement (French “unknotting”): the point at which a narrative can be resolved and so ended.

dialogue (Greek “conversation”): a **genre**. Dialogue is a feature of many genres, especially in both the **novel** and drama. As a genre itself, dialogue is used in philosophical traditions especially (most famously in Plato’s *Dialogues*), as the representation of a conversation in which a philosophical question is pursued among various speakers.

d iction, or “**lexis**” (from, respectively, Latin *dictio* and Greek *lexis*, each meaning “word”): the actual words used in any utterance—speech, writing, and, for our purposes here, literary works. The choice of words contributes significantly to the style of a given work.

d idactic mode (Greek “teaching mode”): **Genres** in a didactic mode are designed to instruct or teach, sometimes explicitly (for example, sermons, philosophical **discourses**, **georgic**), and sometimes through the medium of fiction (for example, **animal fable**, **parable**).

d iegesis (Greek for “narration”): a term that simply means “narration,” but is used in literary criticism to distinguish one kind of story from another. In a *mimetic* story, the events are played out before us (see **mimesis**), whereas in diegesis someone recounts the story to us. Drama is for the most part *mimetic*, whereas the novel is for the most part diegetic. In novels the narrator is not, usually, part of the action of the narrative; s/he is therefore extradiegetic.

dimeter (Greek “two measure”): a term of **meter**. A two-stress line, rarely used as the meter of whole poems, though used with great frequency in single poems by Skelton, for example, “The Tunning of Elinour Rumming” (see vol. B, [p. 41](#)). Otherwise used for

single lines, as in Herbert, "Discipline," line 3: "O my God" (see vol. B, [p. 1197](#)).

d discourse (Latin "running to and fro"): broadly, any nonfictional speech or writing; as a more specific genre, a philosophical meditation on a set theme.

dramatic irony: a feature of narrative and drama, whereby the audience knows that the outcome of an action will be the opposite of that intended by a **character**.

dramatic monologue (Greek "single speaking"): a **genre**. A poem in which the voice of a historical or fictional **character** speaks, unmediated by any narrator, to an implied though silent audience. See Tennyson, "Ulysses" (vol. E, [p. 217](#)); Browning, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (vol. E, [p. 416](#)); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (vol. F, [p. 498](#)); Carol Ann Duffy, "Medusa" and "Mrs Lazarus" (vol. F).

ecphrasis (Greek "speaking out"): a **topos** whereby a work of visual art is represented in a literary work. Auden, "Musée des Beaux Arts" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)).

elegy: a **genre**. In **classical** literature elegy was a form written in elegiac **couplets** (a **hexameter** followed by a **pentameter**) devoted to many possible topics. In Ovidian elegy a lover meditates on the trials of erotic desire (for example, Ovid's *Amores*). The **sonnet** sequences of both Sidney and Shakespeare exploit this genre, and, while it was still practiced in classical tradition by Donne ("On His Mistress" [see vol. B, [p. 903](#)]), by the later seventeenth century the term came to denote the poetry of loss, especially through the death of a loved person. See Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (vol. E, [p. 231](#)); Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (see vol. F, [p. 677](#)); Heaney, "Clearances" (vol. F, [p. 970](#)).

emblem (Greek "an insertion"): a **figure of thought**. A picture allegorically expressing a moral, or a verbal picture open to such

interpretation.

end-stopping: the placement of a complete syntactic unit within a complete poetic line, fulfilling the metrical pattern; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," line 42: "Earth, receive an honoured guest" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)). Compare **enjambment**.

enjambment (French "striding," encroaching): The opposite of **end-stopping**, enjambment occurs when the syntactic unit does not end with the end of the poetic line and the fulfillment of the metrical pattern. When the sense of the line overflows its meter and, therefore, the line break, we have enjambment; Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," lines 44–45: "Let the Irish vessel lie / Emptied of its poetry" (see vol. F, [p. 679](#)).

epic (synonym, *heroic poetry*): a **genre**. An extended narrative poem celebrating martial heroes, invoking divine inspiration, beginning in medias res (see **order**), written in a high style (including the deployment of **epic similes**; on high style, see **register**), and divided into long narrative sequences. Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid* were the prime models for English writers of epic verse. Thus Milton, *Paradise Lost* (see vol. B, p. 1427); Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (see vol. D, [p. 391](#)); and Walcott, *Omeros* (see vol. F, [p. 808](#)). With its precise repertoire of stylistic resources, epic lent itself easily to **parodic** and **burlesque** forms, known as **mock epic**; thus Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (see vol. C, [p. 537](#)).

epigram: a **genre**. A short, pithy poem wittily expressed, often with wounding intent. See Jonson, *Epigrams* (see vol. B, [p. 1049](#)).

epigraph (Greek "inscription"): a **genre**. Any formal statement inscribed on stone; also the brief formulation on a book's title page, or a quotation at the beginning of a poem, introducing the work's themes in the most compressed form possible.

epistle (Latin "letter"): a **genre**. The letter can be shaped as a literary form, involving an intimate address often between equals.

The *Epistles* of Horace provided a model for English writers from the sixteenth century. Thus Wyatt, "Mine Own John Poins" (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)), or Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady" (vol. C, [p. 771](#)). Letters can be shaped to form the matter of an extended fiction, as the eighteenth-century epistolary **novel** (for example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*).

epitaph: a **genre**. A pithy formulation to be inscribed on a funeral monument. Thus Raleigh, "The Author's Epitaph, Made by Himself" (see vol. B, [p. 479](#)).

epithalamion (Greek "concerning the bridal chamber"): a **genre**. A wedding poem, celebrating the marriage and wishing the couple good fortune. Thus Spenser, *Epithalamion* (see vol. B, [p. 455](#)).

epyllion (plural "epyllia") (Greek: "little epic"): a **genre**. A relatively short poem in the meter of epic poetry. See, for example, Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* (vol. B, [p. 562](#)).

essay (French "trial, attempt"): a **genre**. An informal philosophical meditation, usually in prose and sometimes in verse. The journalistic periodical essay was developed in the early eighteenth century. Thus Addison and Steele, periodical essays (see vol. C, [p. 281](#)); Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (see vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

euphemism (Greek "sweet saying"): a **figure of thought**. The figure by which something distasteful is described in alternative, less repugnant terms (for example, "he passed away").

exegesis (Greek "leading out"): interpretation, traditionally of the biblical text, but, by transference, of any text.

exemplum (Latin "example"): an example inserted into a usually nonfictional writing (for example, sermon or **essay**) to give extra force to an abstract thesis.

fabliau (French “little story,” plural *fabliaux*): a **genre**. A short, funny, often bawdy narrative in low style (see **register**) imitated and developed from French models, most subtly by Chaucer; see *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale* (vol. A, [p. 494](#)).

farce (French “stuffing”): a **genre**. A play designed to provoke laughter through the often humiliating antics of stock **characters**. Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (see vol. C, [p. 221](#)) draws on this tradition.

figures of speech: Literary language often employs patterns perceptible to the eye and/or to the ear. Such patterns are called “figures of speech”; in classical rhetoric they were called “schemes” (from Greek *schema*, meaning “form, figure”).

figures of thought: Language can also be patterned conceptually, even outside the rules that normally govern it. Literary language in particular exploits this licensed linguistic irregularity. Synonyms for figures of thought are “trope” (Greek “twisting,” referring to the irregularity of use) and “conceit” (Latin “concept,” referring to the fact that these figures are perceptible only to the mind). Be careful not to confuse **trope** with **topos** (a common error).

first-person narration: relevant to **point of view**, a narrative in which the voice narrating refers to itself with forms of the first-person pronoun (“I,” “me,” “my,” etc., or possibly “we,” “us,” “our”), and in which the narrative is determined by the limitations of that voice. Thus Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*.

frame narrative: Some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives to follow. Thus Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*; or Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

free indirect style: relevant to **point of view**, a narratorial voice that manages, without explicit reference, to imply, and often

implicitly to comment on, the voice of a **character** in the narrative itself. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," where the voice, although strictly that of the adult narrator, manages to convey the child's manner of perception: "—I begin: the first memory. This was of red and purple flowers on a black background—my mother's dress."

genre and mode: The **style**, structure, and, often, length of a work, when coupled with a certain subject matter, raise expectations that a literary work conforms to a certain **genre** (French "kind"). Good writers might upset these expectations, but they remain aware of the expectations and thwart them purposefully. Works in different genres may nevertheless participate in the same **mode**, a broader category designating the fundamental perspectives governing various genres of writing. For mode, see **tragic, comic, satiric, and didactic modes**. Genres are fluid, sometimes very fluid (for example, the **novel**); the word "usually" should be added to almost every account of the characteristics of a given genre!

georgic (Greek "farming"): a **genre**. Virgil's *Georgics* treat agricultural and occasionally scientific subjects, giving instructions on the proper management of farms. Unlike **pastoral**, which treats the countryside as a place of recreational idleness among shepherds, the georgic treats it as a place of productive labor.

hermeneutics (from the Greek god Hermes, messenger between the gods and humankind): the science of interpretation, first formulated as such by the German philosophical theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century.

heroic poetry: see **epic**.

hexameter (Greek "six measure"): a term of **meter**. The hexameter line (a six-stress line) is the meter of **classical** Latin **epic**; while not imitated in that form for epic verse in English, some instances of the hexameter exist. See, for example, the last line of a

Spenserian stanza, *Faerie Queene* 1.1.2: "O help thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (vol. B, [p. 269](#)), or Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," line 1: "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree" (vol. F, [p. 221](#)).

homily (Greek "discourse"): a **genre**. A sermon, to be preached in church; *Book of Homilies* (see vol. B, [p. 164](#)). Writers of literary fiction sometimes exploit the homily, or sermon, as in Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Tale* (see vol. A, [p. 540](#)).

homophone (Greek "same sound"): a **figure of speech**. A word that sounds identical to another word but has a different meaning ("bear" / "bare").

hyperbaton (Greek "overstepping"): a term of **syntax**. The rearrangement, or inversion, of the expected word order in a sentence or clause. Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," line 38: "If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise" (vol. C, [p. 899](#)). Poets can suspend the expected syntax over many lines, as in the first sentences of the *Canterbury Tales* (vol. A, [p. 474](#)) and of *Paradise Lost* (vol. B, p. 1430).

hyperbole (Greek "throwing over"): a **figure of thought**. Overstatement, exaggeration; Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," lines 11–12: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires, and more slow" (see vol. B, p. 1273); Auden, "As I Walked Out One Evening," lines 9–12: "I'll love you, dear, I'll love you / Till China and Africa meet / And the river jumps over the mountain / And the salmon sing in the street" (see vol. F, [p. 675](#)).

hypermetrical (adj.; Greek "over measured"): a term of **meter**; the word describes a breaking of the expected metrical pattern by at least one extra syllable.

hypotaxis, or **subordination** (respectively Greek and Latin "ordering under"): a term of **syntax**. The subordination, by the use of subordinate clauses, of different elements of a sentence to a

single main verb. Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9.513–15: “As when a ship by skillful steersman wrought / Nigh river’s mouth or foreland, where the wind / Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail; So varied he” (vol. B, p. 1588). The contrary principle to **parataxis**.

iamb: a term of **rhythm**. The basic foot of English verse; two syllables following the rhythmic pattern of unstressed followed by stressed and producing a rising effect. Thus, for example, “Vermont.”

imitation: the practice whereby writers strive ideally to reproduce and yet renew the **conventions** of an older form, often derived from **classical** civilization. Such a practice will be praised in periods of classicism (for example, the eighteenth century) and repudiated in periods dominated by a model of inspiration (for example, Romanticism).

irony (Greek “dissimulation”): a **figure of thought**. In broad usage, irony designates the result of inconsistency between a statement and a context that undermines the statement. “It’s a beautiful day” is unironic if it’s a beautiful day; if, however, the weather is terrible, then the inconsistency between statement and context is ironic. The effect is often amusing; the need to be ironic is sometimes produced by censorship of one kind or another. Strictly, irony is a subset of allegory: whereas allegory says one thing and means another, irony says one thing and means its opposite. For an extended example of irony, see Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)). See also **dramatic irony**.

journal (French “daily”): a **genre**. A diary, or daily record of ephemeral experience, whose perspectives are concentrated on, and limited by, the experiences of single days. Thus Pepys, *Diary* (see vol. C, [p. 74](#)).

lai: a **genre**. A short narrative, often characterized by images of great intensity; a French term, and a form practiced by Marie de France (see vol. A, [p. 159](#)).

legend (Latin “requiring to be read”): a **genre**. A narrative of a celebrated, possibly historical, but mortal **protagonist**. To be distinguished from **myth**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

lexical set: Words that habitually recur together (for example, January, February, March, etc.; or red, white, and blue) form a lexical set.

litotes (from Greek “smooth”): a **figure of thought**. Strictly, understatement by denying the contrary; More, *Utopia*: “differences of no slight import” (see vol. B, [p. 49](#)). More loosely, understatement; Stevie Smith, “Sunt Leones,” lines 11–12: “And if the Christians felt a little blue— / Well people being eaten often do” (see vol. F, [p. 585](#)).

lullaby: a **genre**. A bedtime, sleep-inducing song for children, in simple and regular meter. Adapted by Auden, “Lullaby” (see vol. F, [p. 671](#)).

lyric (from Greek “lyre”): Initially meaning a song, “lyric” refers to a short poetic form, without restriction of meter, in which the expression of personal emotion, often by a voice in the first person, is given primacy over narrative sequence. Thus “The Wife’s Lament” (see vol. A, [p. 126](#)); Yeats, “The Wild Swans at Coole” (see vol. F, [p. 229](#)).

masque: a **genre**. Costly entertainments of the Stuart court, involving dance, song, speech, and elaborate stage effects, in which courtiers themselves participated.

metaphor (Greek “carrying across,” etymologically parallel to Latin “translation”): One of the most significant **figures of thought**, metaphor designates identification or implicit identification of one thing with another with which it is not literally identifiable. Blake, “London,” lines 11–12: “And the hapless Soldier’s sigh / Runs in blood down Palace walls” (see vol. D, [p. 137](#)).

meter: Verse (from Latin *versus*, turned) is distinguished from prose (from Latin *prorsus*, "straightforward") as a more compressed form of expression, shaped by metrical norms. **Meter** (Greek "measure") refers to the regularly recurring sound pattern of verse lines. The means of producing sound patterns across lines differ in different poetic traditions. Verse may be **quantitative**, or determined by the quantities of syllables (set patterns of long and short syllables), as in Latin and Greek poetry. It may be **syllabic**, determined by fixed numbers of syllables in the line, as in the verse of Romance languages (for example, French and Italian). It may be **accentual**, determined by the number of accents, or stresses in the line, with variable numbers of syllables, as in Old English and some varieties of Middle English alliterative verse. Or it may be **accentual-syllabic**, determined by the numbers of accents, but possessing a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, so as to produce regular numbers of syllables per line. Since Chaucer, English verse has worked primarily within the many possibilities of accentual-syllabic meter. The unit of meter is the **foot**. In English verse the number of feet per line corresponds to the number of accents in a line. For the types and examples of different meters, see **monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter**. In the definitions below, "u" designates one unstressed syllable, and "/" one stressed syllable.

metonymy (Greek "change of name"): one of the most significant **figures of thought**. Using a word to **denote** another concept or other concepts, by virtue of habitual association. Thus "The Press," designating printed news media. Fictional names often work by associations of this kind. Closely related to **synecdoche**.

mimesis (Greek for "imitation"): A central function of literature and drama has been to provide a plausible imitation of the reality of the world beyond the literary work; mimesis is the representation and imitation of what is taken to be reality.

mise-en-abyme (French for “cast into the abyss”): Some works of art represent themselves in themselves; if they do so effectively, the represented artifact also represents itself, and so ad infinitum. The effect achieved is called “*mise-en-abyme*.” Hoccleve’s *Complaint*, for example, represents a depressed man reading about a depressed man. This sequence threatens to become a *mise-en-abyme*.

monometer (Greek “one measure”): a term of **meter**. An entire line with just one stress; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, line 15, “most (u) grand (/)” (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)).

myth: a **genre**. The narrative of **protagonists** with, or subject to, superhuman powers. A myth expresses some profound foundational truth, often by accounting for the origin of natural phenomena. To be distinguished from **legend**. Thus the “Arthurian legend” but the “myth of Proserpine.”

novel: an extremely flexible **genre** in both form and subject matter. Usually in prose, giving high priority to narration of events, with a certain expectation of length, novels are preponderantly rooted in a specific, and often complex, social world; sensitive to the realities of material life; and often focused on one **character** or a small circle of central characters. By contrast with chivalric **romance** (the main European narrative genre prior to the novel), novels tend to eschew the marvelous in favor of a recognizable social world and credible action. The novel’s openness allows it to participate in all modes, and to be co-opted for a huge variety of subgenres. In English literature the novel dates from the late seventeenth century and has been astonishingly successful in appealing to a huge readership, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The English and Irish tradition of the novel includes, for example, Fielding, Austen, the Brontë sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Conrad, Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce, to name but a few very great exponents of the genre.

novella: a **genre**. A short **novel**, often characterized by imagistic intensity. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (see vol. F, [p. 70](#)).

occupatio (Latin “taking possession”): a **figure of thought**. Denying that one will discuss a subject while actually discussing it; also known as “praeteritio” (Latin “passing by”). See Chaucer, *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, lines 414–31 (see vol. A, [p. 565](#)).

ode (Greek “song”): a **genre**. A **lyric** poem in elevated, or high style (see **register**), often addressed to a natural force, a person, or an abstract quality. The Pindaric ode in English is made up of **stanzas** of unequal length, while the Horatian ode has stanzas of equal length. For examples of both types, see, respectively, Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (vol. D, [p. 381](#)); and Marvell, “An Horatian Ode” (vol. B, p. 1282), or Keats, “Ode on Melancholy” (vol. D, [p. 973](#)). For a fuller discussion, see the headnote to Jonson’s “Ode on Cary and Morison” (vol. B, [p. 1058](#)).

omniscient narrator (Latin “all-knowing narrator”): relevant to **point of view**. A narrator who, in the fiction of the narrative, has complete access to both the deeds and the thoughts of all **characters** in the narrative. Thus Thomas Hardy, “On the Western Circuit” (see vol. F, [p. 36](#)).

onomatopoeia (Greek “name making”): a **figure of speech**. Verbal sounds that imitate and evoke the sounds they denote. Hopkins, “Binsey Poplars,” lines 10–12 (about some felled trees): “O if we but knew what we do / When we delve [dig] or hew— / Hack and rack the growing green!” (see vol. E, [p. 726](#)).

order: A story may be told in different narrative orders. A narrator might use the sequence of events as they happened, and thereby follow what **classical** rhetoricians called the *natural order*; alternatively, the narrator might reorder the sequence of events, beginning the narration either in the middle or at the end of the sequence of events, thereby following an *artificial order*. If a narrator

begins in the middle of events, he or she is said to begin *in medias res* (Latin "in the middle of the matter"). For a brief discussion of these concepts, see Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, "A Letter of the Authors" (vol. B, [p. 265](#)). Modern narratology makes a related distinction, between *histoire* (French "story") for the natural order that readers mentally reconstruct, and *discours* (French, here "narration") for the narrative as presented. See also **plot** and **story**.

ottava rima: a verse form. An eight-line stanza form, rhyming abababcc, using **iambic pentameter**; Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (see vol. F, [p. 234](#)). Derived from the Italian poet Boccaccio, an eight-line stanza was used by fifteenth-century English poets for inset passages (for example, Christ's speech from the Cross in Lydgate's *Testament*, lines 754–897). The form in this rhyme scheme was used in English poetry for long narrative by, for example, Byron (*Don Juan*; see vol. D, [p. 690](#)).

oxymoron (Greek "sharp blunt"): a **figure of thought**. The conjunction of normally incompatible terms; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.63: "darkness visible" (see vol. B, p. 1431).

panegyric: a genre. Demonstrative, or epideictic (Greek "showing"), rhetoric was a branch of **classical** rhetoric. Its own two main branches were the rhetoric of praise on the one hand and of vituperation on the other. Panegyric, or eulogy (Greek "sweet speaking"), or encomium (plural *encomia*), is the term used to describe the speeches or writings of praise.

parable: a genre. A simple story designed to provoke, and often accompanied by, **allegorical** interpretation, most famously by Christ as reported in the Gospels.

paradox (Greek "contrary to received opinion"): a **figure of thought**. An apparent contradiction that requires thought to reveal an inner consistency. Chaucer, "Troilus's Song," line 12: "O sweete harm so quainte" (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

parataxis, or **coordination** (respectively Greek and Latin “ordering beside”): a term of **syntax**. The coordination, by the use of coordinating conjunctions, of different main clauses in a single sentence. Malory, *Morte Darthur*: “So Sir Lancelot departed and took his sword under his arm, and so he walked in his mantel, that noble knight, and put himself in great jeopardy” (see vol. A, [p. 607](#)). The opposite principle to **hypotaxis**.

parody: a work that uses the **conventions** of a particular genre with the aim of comically mocking a **topos**, a genre, or a particular exponent of a genre. Shakespeare parodies the topos of **blazon** in Sonnet 130 (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

pastoral (from Latin *pastor*, “shepherd”): a **genre**. Pastoral is set among shepherds, making often refined **allusion** to other apparently unconnected subjects (sometimes politics) from the potentially idyllic world of highly literary if illiterate shepherds. Pastoral is distinguished from **georgic** by representing recreational rural idleness, whereas the georgic offers instruction on how to manage rural labor. English writers had classical models in the *Idylls* of Theocritus in Greek and Virgil’s *Eclogues* in Latin. Pastoral is also called bucolic (from the Greek word for “herdsman”). Thus Spenser, *Shepheardes Calender* (see vol. B, [p. 257](#)).

pathetic fallacy: the attribution of sentiment to natural phenomena, as if they were in sympathy with human feelings. Thus Milton, *Lycidas*, lines 146–47: “With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, / And every flower that sad embroidery wears” (see vol. B, p. 1406). For critique of the practice, see Ruskin (who coined the term), “Of the Pathetic Fallacy” (vol. E, [p. 467](#)).

pentameter (Greek “five measure”): a term of **meter**. In English verse, a five-stress line. Between the late fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this meter, frequently employing an iambic rhythm, was the basic line of English verse. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth each, for example, deployed this very

flexible line as their primary resource; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.128: "O Prince, O Chief of many thronèd Powers" (see vol. B, p. 1433).

performative: Verbal expressions have many different functions. They can, for example, be descriptive, or constative (if they make an argument), or performative, for example. A performative utterance is one that makes something happen in the world by virtue of its utterance. "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison," if uttered in the appropriate circumstances, itself performs an action; it makes something happen in the world. By virtue of its performing an action, it is called a "performative." See also **speech act**.

peripeteia (Greek "turning about"): the sudden reversal of fortune (in both directions) in a dramatic work.

periphrasis (Greek "declaring around"): a **figure of thought**. Circumlocution; the use of many words to express what could be expressed in few or one; Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 39.1–4.

persona (Latin "sound through"): originally the mask worn in the Roman theater to magnify an actor's voice; in literary discourse *persona* (plural *personae*) refers to the narrator or speaker of a text, whose voice is coherent and whose person need have no relation to the person of the actual author of a text. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (see vol. F, [p. 498](#)).

personification, or **prosopopoeia** (Greek "person making"): a **figure of thought**. The attribution of human qualities to nonhuman forces or objects; Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," lines 1–2: "Thou still unvanish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (see vol. D, [p. 971](#)).

plot: the sequence of events in a story as narrated, as distinct from **story**, which refers to the sequence of events as we reconstruct them from the plot. See also **order**.

point of view: All of the many kinds of writing involve a point of view from which a text is, or seems to be, generated. The presence of such a point of view may be powerful and explicit, as in many novels, or deliberately invisible, as in much drama. In some genres, such as the **novel**, the narrator does not necessarily tell the story from a position we can predict; that is, the needs of a particular story, not the **conventions** of the genre, determine the narrator's position. In other genres, the narrator's position is fixed by convention; in certain kinds of love poetry, for example, the narrating voice is always that of a suffering lover. Not only does the point of view significantly inform the style of a work, but it also informs the structure of that work.

protagonist (Greek "first actor"): the hero or heroine of a drama or narrative.

pun: a **figure of thought**. A sometimes irresolvable doubleness of meaning in a single word or expression; Shakespeare, Sonnet 135, line 1: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*" (see vol. B, [p. 637](#)).

quatrain: a **verse form**. A stanza of four lines, usually rhyming abcb, abab, or abba. Of many possible examples, see Crashaw, "On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord" (see vol. B, [p. 1214](#)).

refrain: usually a single line repeated as the last line of consecutive stanzas, sometimes with subtly different wording and ideally with subtly different meaning as the poem progresses.

register: The register of a word is its stylistic level, which can be distinguished by degree of technicality but also by degree of formality. We choose our words from different registers according to context, that is, audience and/or environment. Thus a chemist in a laboratory will say "sodium chloride," a cook in a kitchen "salt." A formal register designates the kind of language used in polite society (for example, "Mr. President"), while an informal or colloquial

register is used in less formal or more relaxed social situations (for example, “the boss”). In **classical** and medieval rhetoric, these registers of formality were called *high style* and *low style*. A *middle style* was defined as the style fit for narrative, not drawing attention to itself.

rhetoric: the art of verbal persuasion. **Classical** rhetoricians distinguished three areas of rhetoric: the forensic, to be used in law courts; the deliberative, to be used in political or philosophical deliberations; and the demonstrative, or epideictic, to be used for the purposes of public praise or blame. Rhetorical manuals covered all the skills required of a speaker, from the management of style and structure to delivery. These manuals powerfully influenced the theory of poetics as a separate branch of verbal practice, particularly in the matter of style.

rhyme: a **figure of speech**. The repetition of identical vowel sounds in stressed syllables whose initial consonants differ (“dead” / “head”). In poetry, rhyme often links the end of one line with another. *Masculine rhyme*: full rhyme on the final syllable of the line (“decays” / “days”). *Feminine rhyme*: full rhyme on syllables that are followed by unaccented syllables (“fountains” / “mountains”). *Internal rhyme*: full rhyme within a single line; Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, line 7: “The guests are met, the feast is set” (see vol. D, [p. 475](#)). *Rhyme riche*: rhyming on **homophones**; Chaucer, *General Prologue*, lines 17–18: “seeke” / “seke.” *Off rhyme* (also known as *half rhyme*, *near rhyme*, or *slant rhyme*): differs from perfect rhyme in changing the vowel sound and/or the concluding consonants expected of perfect rhyme; Byron, “They say that Hope is Happiness,” lines 5–7: “most” / “lost.” *Pararhyme*: stressed vowel sounds differ but are flanked by identical or similar consonants; Owen, “Miners,” lines 9–11: “simmer” / “summer” (see vol. F, [p. 169](#)).

rhyme royal: a **verse form**. A **stanza** of seven **iambic pentameter** lines, rhyming ababbcc; first introduced by Chaucer

and called “royal” because the form was used by James I of Scotland for his *Kingis Quair* in the early fifteenth century. Chaucer, “Troilus’s Song” (see vol. A, [p. 574](#)).

rhythm: Rhythm is not absolutely distinguishable from **meter**. One way of making a clear distinction between these terms is to say that rhythm (from the Greek “to flow”) denotes the patterns of sound within the feet of verse lines and the combination of those feet. Very often a particular meter will raise expectations that a given rhythm will be used regularly through a whole line or a whole poem. Thus in English verse the pentameter regularly uses an iambic rhythm. Rhythm, however, is much more fluid than meter, and many lines within the same poem using a single meter will frequently exploit different rhythmic possibilities. For examples of different rhythms, see **iamb**, **trochee**, **anapest**, **spondee**, and **dactyl**.

romance: a **genre**. From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the main form of European narrative, in either verse or prose, was that of chivalric romance. Romance, like the later **novel**, is a very fluid genre, but romances are often characterized by (i) a tripartite structure of social integration, followed by disintegration, involving moral tests and often marvelous events, itself the prelude to reintegration in a happy ending, frequently of marriage; and (ii) aristocratic social milieux. Thus *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (see vol. A, [p. 415](#)); Spenser’s (unfinished) *Faerie Queene* (vol. B, [p. 263](#)). The immensely popular, fertile genre was absorbed, in both domesticated and undomesticated form, by the novel. For an adaptation of romance, see Chaucer, *Wife of Bath’s Tale* (vol. A, [p. 512](#)).

sarcasm (Greek “flesh tearing”): a **figure of thought**. A wounding expression, often expressed ironically; Boswell, *Life of Johnson*: Johnson [asked if any man of the modern age could have written the **epic** poem *Fingal*] replied, “Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children” (see vol. C, [p. 891](#)).

satire (Latin for “a bowl of mixed fruits”): a **genre**. In Roman literature (for example, Juvenal), the communication, in the form of a letter between equals, complaining of the ills of contemporary society. The genre in this form is characterized by a first-person narrator exasperated by social ills; the letter form; a high frequency of contemporary reference; and the use of invective in **low-style** language. Pope practices the genre thus in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (see vol. C, [p. 573](#)). Wyatt’s “Mine Own John Pains” (see vol. B, [p. 131](#)) draws ultimately on a gentler, Horatian model of the genre.

satiric mode: Works in a very large variety of genres are devoted to the more or less savage attack on social ills. Thus Swift’s travel narrative *Gulliver’s Travels* (see vol. C, [p. 377](#)), his **essay** “A Modest Proposal” (vol. C, [p. 511](#)), and Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* (vol. C, [p. 587](#)), to look no further than the eighteenth century, are all within a satiric mode.

scene: a subdivision of an **act**, itself a subdivision of a dramatic performance and/or text. The action of a scene usually occurs in one place.

sensibility (from Latin, “capable of being perceived by the senses”): as a literary term, an eighteenth-century concept derived from moral philosophy that stressed the social importance of fellow feeling and particularly of sympathy in social relations. The concept generated a literature of “sensibility,” such as the sentimental **novel** (the most famous of which was Goethe’s *Sorrows of the Young Werther* [1774]), or sentimental poetry, such as Cowper’s passage on the stricken deer in *The Task* (see vol. C, [p. 1076](#)).

short story: a **genre**. Generically similar to, though shorter and more concentrated than, the **novel**; often published as part of a collection. Thus Mansfield, “The Daughters of the Late Colonel” (see vol. F, [p. 542](#)).

simile (Latin “like”): a **figure of thought**. Comparison, usually using the word “like” or “as,” of one thing with another so as to produce sometimes surprising analogies. Donne, “The Storm,” lines 29–30: “Sooner than you read this line did the gale, / Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail.” Frequently used, in extended form, in **epic** poetry; Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1.338–46 (see vol. B, p. 1438).

soliloquy (Latin “single speaking”): a **topos** of drama, in which a **character**, alone or thinking to be alone on stage, speaks so as to give the audience access to his or her private thoughts.

sonnet: a **verse form**. A form combining a variable number of units of rhymed lines to produce a fourteen-line poem, usually in rhyming **iambic pentameter** lines. In English there are two principal varieties: the Petrarchan sonnet, formed by an octave (an eight-line stanza, often broken into two **quatrains** having the same rhyme scheme, typically abba abba) and a sestet (a six-line stanza, typically cdecde or cdcdcd); and the Shakespearean sonnet, formed by three quatrains (abab cdcd efef) and a **couplet** (gg). The declaration of a sonnet can take a sharp turn, or “volta,” often at the decisive formal shift from octave to sestet in the Petrarchan sonnet, or in the final couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet, introducing a trenchant counterstatement. Derived from Italian poetry, and especially from the poetry of Petrarch, the sonnet was first introduced to English poetry by Wyatt, and initially used principally for the expression of unrequited erotic love, though later poets used the form for many other purposes. See Wyatt, “Whoso List to Hunt” (vol. B, [p. 123](#)); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (vol. B, [p. 541](#)); Shakespeare, *Sonnets* (vol. B, [p. 624](#)); Wordsworth, “London, 1802” (vol. D, [p. 390](#)); McKay, “If We Must Die” (vol. F, [p. 576](#)); Heaney, “Clearances” (vol. F, [p. 970](#)).

speech act: Words and deeds are often distinguished, but words are often (perhaps always) themselves deeds. Utterances can perform different speech acts, such as promising, declaring, casting

a spell, encouraging, persuading, denying, lying, and so on. See also **performative**.

Spenserian stanza: a **verse form**. The stanza developed by Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*; nine **iambic** lines, the first eight of which are **pentameters**, followed by one **hexameter**, rhyming ababbcbcc. See also, for example, Shelley, *Adonais* (vol. D, [p. 851](#)), and Keats, *The Eve of St. Agnes* (vol. D, [p. 953](#)).

spondee: a term of **meter**. A two-syllable foot following the rhythmic pattern, in English verse, of two stressed syllables. Thus, for example, "Utah."

stanza (Italian "room"): groupings of two or more lines, though "stanza" is usually reserved for groupings of at least four lines. Stanzas are often joined by rhyme, often in sequence, where each group shares the same metrical pattern and, when rhymed, rhyme scheme. Stanzas can themselves be arranged into larger groupings. Poets often invent new **verse forms**, or they may work within established forms.

story: a narrative's sequence of events, which we reconstruct from those events as they have been recounted by the narrator (i.e., the **plot**). See also **order**.

stream of consciousness: usually a **first-person** narrative that seems to give the reader access to the narrator's mind as it perceives or reflects on events, prior to organizing those perceptions into a coherent narrative. Thus (though generated from a **third-person** narrative) Joyce, *Ulysses*, "Penelope" (see vol. F, [p. 452](#)).

style (from Latin for "writing instrument"): In literary works the manner in which something is expressed contributes substantially to its meaning. The expressions "sun," "mass of helium at the center of the solar system," "heaven's golden orb" all designate "sun," but do so in different manners, or styles, which produce different meanings. The manner of a literary work is its "style," the effect of which is its

“tone.” We often can intuit the tone of a text; from that intuition of tone we can analyze the stylistic resources by which it was produced. We can analyze the style of literary works through consideration of different elements of style; for example, **diction, figures of thought, figures of speech, meter and rhythm, verse form, syntax, point of view.**

sublime: As a concept generating a literary movement, the sublime refers to the realm of experience beyond the measurable, and so beyond the rational, produced especially by the terrors and grandeur of natural phenomena. Derived especially from the first-century Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, sometimes attributed to Longinus, the notion of the sublime was in the later eighteenth century a spur to Romanticism.

syllable: the smallest unit of sound in a pronounced word. The syllable that receives the greatest stress is called the *tonic* syllable.

symbol (Greek “token”): a **figure of thought**. Something that stands for something else, and yet seems necessarily to evoke that other thing. In Neoplatonic, and therefore Romantic, theory, to be distinguished from **allegory** thus: whereas allegory involves connections between vehicle and tenor agreed by convention or made explicit, the meanings of a symbol are supposedly inherent to it.

synecdoche (Greek “to take with something else”): a **figure of thought**. Using a part to express the whole, or vice versa; for example, “all hands on deck.” Closely related to **metonymy**.

syntax (Greek “ordering with”): Syntax designates the rules by which sentences are constructed in a given language. Discussion of meter is impossible without some reference to syntax, since the overall effect of a poem is, in part, always the product of a subtle balance of meter and sentence construction. Syntax is also essential to the understanding of prose style, since prose writers, deprived of

the full shaping possibilities of meter, rely all the more heavily on syntactic resources. A working command of syntactical practice requires an understanding of the parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and interjections), since writers exploit syntactic possibilities by using particular combinations and concentrations of the parts of speech.

taste (from Italian “touch”): Although medieval monastic traditions used eating and tasting as a metaphor for reading, the concept of taste as a personal ideal to be cultivated by, and applied to, the appreciation and judgment of works of art in general was developed in the eighteenth century.

tercet: a **verse form**. A stanza or group of three lines, used in larger forms such as **terza rima**, the **Petrarchan sonnet**, and the **villanelle**.

terza rima: a **verse form**. A sequence of rhymed **tercets** linked by rhyme thus: aba bcb cdc, etc. first used extensively by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, the form was adapted in English **iambic pentameters** by Wyatt and revived in the nineteenth century. See Wyatt, “Mine Own John Poins” (vol. B, [p. 131](#)); Shelley, “Ode to the West Wind” (vol. D, [p. 802](#)); and Morris, “The Defence of Guinevere” (vol. E, [p. 657](#)). For modern adaptations see Eliot, lines 78–149 (though unrhymed) of “Little Gidding” (vol. F, [pp. 523–25](#)); Heaney, “Station Island” (vol. F, [p. 968](#)); Walcott, *Omeros* (vol. F, [p. 806](#)).

tetrameter (Greek “four measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with four stresses. Coleridge, *Christabel*, line 31: “She stole along, she nothing spoke” (see vol. D, [p. 495](#)).

theme (Greek “proposition”): In literary criticism the term designates what the work is about; the theme is the concept that unifies a given work of literature.

third-person narration: relevant to **point of view**. A narration in which the narrator recounts a narrative of **characters** referred to

explicitly or implicitly by third-person pronouns ("he," "she," etc.), without the limitation of a **first-person narration**. Thus Johnson, *The History of Rasselas*.

topographical poem (Greek "place writing"): a **genre**. A poem devoted to the meditative description of particular places.

topos (Greek "place," plural *topoi*): a commonplace in the content of a given kind of literature. Originally, in **classical** rhetoric, the *topoi* were tried-and-tested stimuli to literary invention: lists of standard headings under which a subject might be investigated. In medieval narrative poems, for example, it was commonplace to begin with a description of spring. Writers did, of course, render the commonplace uncommon, as in Chaucer's spring scene at the opening of *The Canterbury Tales* (see vol. A, [p. 474](#)).

tradition (from Latin "passing on"): A literary tradition is whatever is passed on or revived from the past in a single literary culture, or drawn from others to enrich a writer's culture. "Tradition" is fluid in reference, ranging from small to large referents: thus it may refer to a relatively small aspect of texts (for example, the tradition of **iambic pentameter**), or it may, at the other extreme, refer to the body of texts that constitute a **canon**.

tragedy: a **genre**. A dramatic representation of the fall of kings or nobles, beginning in happiness and ending in catastrophe. Later transferred to other social milieux. The opposite of **comedy**; thus Shakespeare, *Othello* (see vol. B, [p. 640](#)).

tragic mode: Many genres (**epic** poetry, **legendary** chronicles, **tragedy**, the **novel**) either do or can participate in a tragic mode, by representing the fall of noble **protagonists** and the irreparable ravages of human society and history.

tragicomedy: a **genre**. A play in which potentially tragic events turn out to have a happy, or **comic**, ending. Thus Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*.

translation (Latin “carrying across”): the rendering of a text written in one language into another.

trimeter (Greek “three measure”): a term of **meter**. A line with three stresses. Herbert, “Discipline,” line 1: “Throw away thy rod” (see vol. B, [p. 1197](#)).

triplet: a **verse form**. A **tercet** rhyming on the same sound. Pope inserts triplets among heroic **couplets** to emphasize a particular thought; see *Essay on Criticism*, 315–17 (vol. C, [p. 521](#)).

trochee: a term of **rhythm**. A two-syllable foot following the pattern, in English verse, of stressed followed by unstressed syllable, producing a falling effect. Thus, for example, “Texas.”

type (Greek “impression, figure”): a **figure of thought**. In Christian allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, pre-Christian figures were regarded as “types,” or foreshadowings, of Christ or the Christian dispensation. *Typology* has been the source of much visual and literary art in which the parallelisms between old and new are extended to nonbiblical figures; thus the virtuous plowman in *Piers Plowman* becomes a type of Christ.

unities: According to a theory supposedly derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the events represented in a play should have unity of time, place, and action: that the play take up no more time than the time of the play, or at most a day; that the space of action should be within a single city; and that there should be no subplot. See Johnson, *The Preface to Shakespeare* (vol. C, [p. 876](#)).

vernacular (from Latin *verna*, “servant”): the language of the people, as distinguished from learned and arcane languages. From the later Middle Ages especially, the “vernacular” languages and literatures of Europe distinguished themselves from the learned languages and literatures of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

verse form: The terms related to **meter** and **rhythm** describe the shape of individual lines. Lines of verse are combined to produce larger groupings, called verse forms. These larger groupings are in the first instance **stanzas**. The combination of a certain meter and stanza shape constitutes the verse form, of which there are many standard kinds.

villanelle: a **verse form**. A fixed form of usually five **tercets** and a **quatrain** employing only two rhyme sounds altogether, rhyming aba for the tercets and abaa for the quatrain, with a complex pattern of two **refrains**. Derived from a French fixed form. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (see vol. F, [p. 693](#)).

wit: Originally a synonym for "reason" in Old and Middle English, "wit" became a literary ideal in the Renaissance as brilliant play of the full range of mental resources. For eighteenth-century writers, the notion necessarily involved pleasing expression, as in Pope's definition of true wit as "Nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed" (*Essay on Criticism*, lines 297–98; see vol. C, [p. 527](#)). Romantic theory of the imagination deprived wit of its full range of apprehension, whence the word came to be restricted to its modern sense, as the clever play of mind that produces laughter.

zeugma (Greek "a yoking"): a **figure of thought**. A figure whereby one word applies to two or more words in a sentence, and in which the applications are surprising, either because one is unusual, or because the applications are made in very different ways; Pope, *Rape of the Lock* 3.7–8, in which the word "take" is used in two senses: "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea" (see vol. C, [p. 546](#)). section#b-publishing-history-censorship.doc-section

B: Publishing History, Censorship

By the time we read texts in published books, they have already been treated—that is, changed by authors, editors, and printers—in many ways. Although there are differences across history, in each period literary works are subject to pressures of many kinds, which apply before, while, and after an author writes. The pressures might be financial, as in the relations of author and patron; commercial, as in the marketing of books; and legal, as in, during some periods, the negotiation through official and unofficial censorship. In addition, texts in all periods undergo technological processes, as they move from the material forms in which an author produced them to the forms in which they are presented to readers. Some of the terms below designate important material forms in which books were produced, disseminated, and surveyed across the historical span of this anthology. Others designate the skills developed to understand these processes. The anthology's introductions to individual periods discuss the particular forms these phenomena took in different eras.

bookseller: In England, and particularly in London, commercial bookmaking and -selling enterprises came into being in the early fourteenth century. These were loose organizations of artisans who usually lived in the same neighborhoods (around St. Paul's Cathedral in London). A bookseller or dealer would coordinate the production of hand-copied books for wealthy patrons (see **patronage**), who would order books to be custom-made. After the introduction of **printing** in the late fifteenth century, authors generally sold the rights to their work to booksellers, without any further **royalties**. Booksellers, who often had their own shops, belonged to the **Stationers' Company**. This system lasted into the eighteenth century. In 1710, however, authors were for the first time granted **copyright**, which tipped the commercial balance in their favor, against booksellers.

censorship: The term applies to any mechanism for restricting what can be published. Historically, the reasons for imposing censorship are heresy, sedition, blasphemy, libel, or obscenity. External censorship is imposed by institutions having legislative

sanctions at their disposal. Thus the pre-Reformation Church imposed the Constitutions of Archbishop Arundel of 1409, aimed at repressing the Lollard “heresy.” After the Reformation, some key events in the history of censorship are as follows: 1547, when anti-Lollard legislation and legislation made by Henry VIII concerning treason by writing (1534) were abolished; the Licensing Order of 1643, which legislated that works be licensed, through the Stationers’ Company, prior to publication; and 1695, when the last such Act stipulating prepublication licensing lapsed. Postpublication censorship continued in different periods for different reasons. Thus, for example, British publication of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) was obstructed (though unsuccessfully) in 1960, under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. Censorship can also be international: although not published in Iran, Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* (1988) was censored in that country, where the leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, proclaimed a fatwa (religious decree) promising the author’s execution. Very often censorship is not imposed externally, however: authors or publishers can censor work in anticipation of what will incur the wrath of readers or the penalties of the law. Victorian and Edwardian publishers of **novels**, for example, urged authors to remove potentially offensive material, especially for serial publication in popular magazines.

codex: the physical format of most modern books and medieval manuscripts, consisting of a series of separate leaves gathered into quires and bound together, often with a cover. In late antiquity, the codex largely replaced the scroll, the standard form of written documents in Roman culture.

copy text: the particular text of a work used by a textual editor as the basis of an edition of that work.

copyright: the legal protection afforded to authors for control of their work’s publication, in an attempt to ensure due financial reward. Some key dates in the history of copyright in the United Kingdom are as follows: 1710, when a statute gave authors the

exclusive right to publish their work for fourteen years, and fourteen years more if the author were still alive when the first term had expired; 1842, when the period of authorial control was extended to forty-two years; and 1911, when the term was extended yet further, to fifty years after the author's death. In 1995 the period of protection was harmonized with the laws in other European countries to be the life of the author plus seventy years. In the United States no works first published before 1923 are in copyright. Works published since 1978 are, as in the United Kingdom, protected for the life of the author plus seventy years.

folio: the leaf formed by both sides of a single page. Each folio has two sides: a *recto* (the front side of the leaf, on the right side of a double-page spread in an open codex), and a *verso* (the back side of the leaf, on the left side of a double-page spread). Modern book pagination follows the pattern 1, 2, 3, 4, while medieval manuscript pagination follows the pattern 1r, 1v, 2r, 2v. "Folio" can also designate the size of a printed book. Books come in different shapes, depending originally on the number of times a standard sheet of paper is folded. One fold produces a large volume, a *folio* book; two folds produce a *quarto*, four an *octavo*, and six a very small *duodecimo*. Generally speaking, the larger the book, the grander and more expensive. Shakespeare's plays were, for example, first printed in quartos, but were gathered into a folio edition in 1623.

foul papers: versions of a work before an author has produced, if she or he has, a final copy (a "fair copy") with all corrections removed.

incunabulum (plural "incunabula"): any printed book produced in Europe before 1501. Famous incunabula include the Gutenberg Bible, printed in 1455.

manuscript (Latin, "written by hand"): Any text written physically by hand is a manuscript. Before the introduction of **printing** with moveable type in 1476, all texts in England were produced and

reproduced by hand, in manuscript. This is an extremely labor-intensive task, using expensive materials (for example, **vellum**, or **parchment**); the cost of books produced thereby was, accordingly, very high. Even after the introduction of printing, many texts continued to be produced in manuscript. This is obviously true of letters, for example, but until the eighteenth century, poetry written within aristocratic circles was often transmitted in manuscript copies.

paleography (Greek "ancient writing"): the art of deciphering, describing, and dating forms of handwriting.

parchment: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **vellum**.

patronage, patron (Latin "protector"): Many technological, legal, and commercial supports were necessary before professional authorship became possible. Although some playwrights (for example, Shakespeare) made a living by writing for the theater, other authors needed, principally, the large-scale reproductive capacities of **printing** and the security of **copyright** to make a living from writing. Before these conditions obtained, many authors had another main occupation, and most authors had to rely on patronage. In different periods, institutions or individuals offered material support, or patronage, to authors. Thus in Anglo-Saxon England, monasteries afforded the conditions of writing to monastic authors. Between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, the main source of patronage was the royal court. Authors offered patrons prestige and ideological support in return for financial support. Even as the conditions of professional authorship came into being at the beginning of the eighteenth century, older forms of direct patronage were not altogether displaced until the middle of the century.

p eriodical: Whereas journalism, strictly, applies to daily writing (from French *jour*, "day"), periodical writing appears at larger, but

still frequent, intervals, characteristically in the form of the **essay**. Periodicals were developed especially in the eighteenth century.

p rinting: Printing, or the mechanical reproduction of books using moveable type, was invented in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century by Johannes Gutenberg; it quickly spread throughout Europe. William Caxton brought printing into England from the Low Countries in 1476. Much greater powers of reproduction at much lower prices transformed every aspect of literary culture.

p ublisher: the person or company responsible for the commissioning and publicizing of printed matter. In the early period of **printing**, publisher, printer, and bookseller were often the same person. This trend continued in the ascendancy of the **Stationers' Company**, between the middle of the sixteenth and the end of the seventeenth centuries. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, these three functions began to separate, leading to their modern distinctions.

quire: When medieval manuscripts were assembled, a few loose sheets of parchment or paper would first be folded together and sewn along the fold. This formed a quire (also known as a "gathering" or "signature"). Folded in this way, four large sheets of parchment would produce eight smaller manuscript leaves. Multiple quires could then be bound together to form a codex.

royalties: an agreed-upon proportion of the price of each copy of a work sold, paid by the publisher to the author, or an agreed-upon fee paid to the playwright for each performance of a play.

scribe: In **manuscript** culture, the scribe is the copyist who reproduces a text by hand.

s criptorium (plural "scriptoria"): a place for producing written documents and manuscripts.

serial publication: generally referring to the practice, especially common in the nineteenth century, of publishing novels a few chapters at a time, in periodicals.

Stationers' Company: The Stationers' Company was an English guild incorporating various tradesmen, including printers, publishers, and booksellers, skilled in the production and selling of books. It was formed in 1403, received its royal charter in 1557, and served as a means both of producing and of regulating books. Authors would sell the manuscripts of their books to individual stationers, who incurred the risks and took the profits of producing and selling the books. The stationers entered their rights over given books in the Stationers' Register. They also regulated the book trade and held their monopoly by licensing books and by being empowered to seize unauthorized books and imprison resisters. This system of licensing broke down in the social unrest of the Civil War and Interregnum (1640–60), and it ended in 1695. Even after the end of licensing, the Stationers' Company continued to be an intrinsic part of the **copyright** process, since the 1710 copyright statute directed that copyright had to be registered at Stationers' Hall.

subscription: An eighteenth-century system of bookselling somewhere between direct **patronage** and impersonal sales. A subscriber paid half the cost of a book before publication and half on delivery. The author received these payments directly. The subscriber's name appeared in the prefatory pages.

textual criticism: Works in all periods often exist in many subtly or not so subtly different forms. This is especially true with regard to manuscript textual reproduction, but it also applies to printed texts. Textual criticism is the art, developed from the fifteenth century in Italy but raised to new levels of sophistication from the eighteenth century, of deciphering different historical states of texts. This art involves the analysis of textual **variants**, often with the aim of distinguishing authorial from scribal forms.

variants: differences that appear among different manuscripts or printed editions of the same text.

vellum: animal skin, used as the material for handwritten books before the introduction of paper. See also **parchment**.

watermark: the trademark of a paper manufacturer, impressed into the paper but largely invisible unless held up to light.

Endnotes

- Note *: This appendix was devised and compiled by James Simpson with the collaboration of all the editors. We especially thank Professor Lara Bovilsky of the University of Oregon at Eugene for her help. [Return to reference *](#)

Geographic Nomenclature

The British Isles refers to the prominent group of islands off the northwest coast of Europe, especially to the two largest, **Great Britain** and **Ireland**. At present these comprise two sovereign states: **the Republic of Ireland**, and **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**—known for short as the **United Kingdom** or the **U.K.** Most of the smaller islands are part of the **U.K.** but a few, like the **Isle of Man** and the tiny **Channel Islands**, are largely independent. The **U.K.** is often loosely referred to as “**Britain**” or “**Great Britain**” and is sometimes called simply, if inaccurately, “**England**.” For obvious reasons, the latter usage is rarely heard among the inhabitants of the other countries of the **U.K.—Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland** (sometimes called **Ulster**). England is by far the most populous part of the kingdom, as well as the seat of its capital, London.

From the first to the fifth century C.E. most of what is now **England** and **Wales** was a province of the Roman Empire called **Britain** (in Latin, **Britannia**). After the fall of Rome, much of the island was invaded and settled by peoples from northern Germany and Denmark speaking what we now call Old English. These peoples are known as the Angles and the Saxons (the word **England** is related to **Angles**). By the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) most of the kingdoms founded by the Angles, the Saxons, and the subsequent Viking invaders had coalesced into the kingdom of **England**, which, in the latter Middle Ages, conquered and largely absorbed the neighboring Celtic kingdom of **Wales**. In 1603 James VI of **Scotland** inherited the island’s other throne as James I of **England**, and for the next hundred years—except for the two decades of Puritan rule—**Scotland** (both its English-speaking **Lowlands** and its Gaelic-speaking **Highlands**) and **England** (with **Wales**) were two kingdoms under a single king. In 1707 the Act of Union brought them together as **the United Kingdom of Great**

Britain. Ireland, where English rule had begun in the twelfth century and been tightened in the sixteenth, was incorporated by the 1800–1801 Act of Union into **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland**. With the division of Ireland and the establishment of **the Irish Free State** after World War I, this name was modified to its present form, and in 1949 **the Irish Free State** became **the Republic of Ireland**, or **Éire**. In 1999 **Scotland** elected a separate parliament it had relinquished in 1707, and **Wales** elected an assembly it lost in 1409; neither Scotland nor Wales ceased to be part of the **United Kingdom**.

The **British Isles** are further divided into counties, which in **Great Britain** are also known as shires. This word, with its vowel shortened in pronunciation, forms the suffix in the names of many counties, such as **Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire**.

The Latin names **Britannia (Britain), Caledonia (Scotland),** and **Hibernia (Ireland)** are sometimes used in poetic diction; so too is **Britain's** ancient Celtic name, **Albion**. Because of its accidental resemblance to *albus* (Latin for “white”), **Albion** is especially associated with the chalk cliffs that seem to gird much of the English coast like defensive walls.

The British Empire took its name from **the British Isles** because it was created not only by the **English** but also by the **Irish, Scots, and Welsh**, as well as by civilians and servicemen from other constituent countries of the empire. Some of the empire's **overseas colonies**, or **crown colonies**, were populated largely by settlers of European origin and their descendants. These predominantly White **settler colonies**, such as **Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**, were allowed significant self-government in the nineteenth century and recognized as **dominions** in the early twentieth century. The **White dominions** became members of **the Commonwealth of Nations**, also called **the Commonwealth, the British Commonwealth**, and “**the Old Commonwealth**” at different times, an association of sovereign states under the symbolic leadership of the British monarch.

Other **overseas colonies** of the empire had mostly Indigenous populations (or, in the Caribbean, the descendants of enslaved people, indentured servants, and others). These **colonies** were granted political independence after World War II, later than the **dominions**, and have often been referred to since as **postcolonial** nations. In South and Southeast Asia, **India** and **Pakistan** gained independence in 1947, followed by other countries including **Sri Lanka** (formerly **Ceylon**), **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), **Malaya** (now **Malaysia**), and **Singapore**. In West and East Africa, the **Gold Coast** was decolonized as **Ghana** in 1957, **Nigeria** in 1960, **Sierra Leone** in 1961, **Uganda** in 1962, **Kenya** in 1963, and so forth, while in southern Africa, the White minority government of **South Africa** was already independent in 1931, though majority rule did not come until 1994. In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** and **Trinidad and Tobago** became independent in 1962, followed by **Barbados** in 1966, and other islands of the British West Indies in the 1970s and '80s. Other regions from which nations emerged out of British colonial rule included Central America (**British Honduras**, now **Belize**), South America (**British Guiana**, now **Guyana**), the Pacific islands (**Fiji**), and Europe (**Cyprus**, **Malta**). After decolonization, many of these nations chose to remain within a newly conceived **Commonwealth** and are sometimes referred to as "**New Commonwealth**" countries. Some nations, such as **Ireland**, **Pakistan**, and **South Africa**, withdrew from the **Commonwealth**, though **South Africa** and **Paki stan** eventually rejoined, and others, such as **Burma** (now **Myanmar**), gained independence outside the **Commonwealth**. Britain's last major overseas colony, **Hong Kong**, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, but while Britain retains only a handful of dependent territories, such as **Bermuda** and **Montserrat**, the scope of the **Commonwealth** remains vast, with approximately 30 percent of the world's population.



British Money

One of the most dramatic changes to the system of British money came in 1971. In the system previously in place, the pound consisted of 20 shillings, each containing 12 pence, making 240 pence to the pound. Since 1971, British money has been calculated on the decimal system, with 100 pence to the pound. Britons' experience of paper money did not change very drastically: as before, 5- and 10-pound notes constitute the majority of bills passing through their hands (in addition, 20- and 50-pound notes have been added). But the shift necessitated a whole new way of thinking about and exchanging coins and marked the demise of the shilling, one of the fundamental units of British monetary history. Many other coins, still frequently encountered in literature, had already passed. These include the groat, worth 4 pence (the word "groat" is often used to signify a trifling sum); the angel (which depicted the archangel Michael triumphing over a dragon), valued at 10 shillings; the mark, worth in its day two-thirds of a pound or 13 shillings 4 pence; and the sovereign, a gold coin initially worth 22 shillings 6 pence, later valued at 1 pound, last circulated in 1932. One prominent older coin, the guinea, was worth a pound and a shilling; though it has not been minted since 1813, a very few quality items or prestige awards (like the purse in a horse race) may still be quoted in guineas. (The table below includes some other obsolete coins.) Colloquially, a pound was (and is) called a quid; a shilling a bob; sixpence, a tanner; a copper could refer to a penny, a half-penny, or a farthing (1/4 penny).

<i>Old Currency</i>	<i>New Currency</i>
1 pound note	1 pound coin (or note in Scotland)
10 shilling (half-pound note)	50 pence
5 shilling (crown)	
2 1/2 shilling (half crown)	20 pence
2 shilling (florin)	10 pence
1 shilling	5 pence
6 pence	
2 1/2 pence	1 penny
2 pence	

1 penny	
1/2 penny	
1/4 penny (farthing)	

Throughout its tenure as a member of the European Union (1973–2020), Britain contemplated but did not make the change to the EU’s common currency, the Euro, reflecting many Britons’ strong identification of their country with its rich commercial history and view of their currency as a national symbol.

Even more challenging than sorting out the values of obsolete coins is calculating for any given period the purchasing power of money, which fluctuates over time by its very nature. As difficult as it is to generalize, it is clear that money used to be worth much more than it is currently. During the early Middle Ages, the most valuable circulating coin was the silver penny: four would buy a sheep. Beyond long-term inflationary trends, prices varied from times of plenty to those marked by poor harvests; from peacetime to wartime; from the country to the metropolis (life in London has always been very expensive); and wages varied according to the availability of labor (wages would sharply rise, for instance, during the devastating Black Death in the fourteenth century). The following chart provides a glimpse of some actual prices of given periods and their changes across time, though all the variables mentioned above prevent them from being definitive. Even from one year to the next, an added tax on gin or tea could drastically raise prices, and a lottery ticket could cost much more the night before the drawing than just a month earlier. Still, the prices quoted below do indicate important trends, such as the disparity of incomes in British society and the costs of basic commodities. In the chart on the following pages, the symbol £ is used for pound, s. for shilling, d. for a penny (from Latin *denarius*); a sum would normally be written £2.19.3—that is 2 pounds, 19 shillings, 3 pence. (This is Leopold Bloom’s budget for the day depicted in Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* [1922]; in the new currency, it would be about £2.96.)

circa	1390	1590	1650	1750	1815	1875
<i>food and drink</i>	gallon (8 pints) of ale, 1.5d.	tankard of beer, .5d.	coffee, 1d. a dish	“drunk for a penny, dead drunk for two-pence” (gin shop sign in Hogarth print)	ounce of laudanum, 3d.	pint of beer, 3d.
	gallon (8 pints) of wine, 3 to 4d.	pound of beef, 2s. 5d.	chicken, 1s. 4d.	dinner at a steakhouse, 1s.	ham and potato dinner for two, 7s.	dinner in a good hotel, 5s.
	pound of cinnamon, 1	pound of cinnamon,	pound of tea, £3	pound of tea, 16s.	bottle of French	pound of tea, 2s.

	to 3s.	10s. 6d.	10s.		claret, 12s.	
<i>entertainment</i>	no cost to watch a cycle play	admission to public theater, 1 to 3d.	falcon, £11 5s.	theater tickets, 1 to 5s.	admission to Covent Garden theater, 1 to 7s.	theater tickets, 6d. to 7s.
	contributory admission to professional troupe theater	cheap seat in private theater, 6d.	billiard table, £25	admission to Vauxhall Gardens, 1s.	annual subscription to Almack's (exclusive club), 10 guineas	admission to Madam Tussaud's waxworks, 1s.
	maintenance for royal hounds at Windsor, .75d. a day	"to see a dead Indian" (<i>The Tempest</i> 2.2.32), 1.25d. (ten "doits")	three-quarter length portrait painting, £31	lottery ticket, £20 (shares were sold)	Jane Austen's piano, 30 guineas	annual fees at a gentleman's club, 7 to 10 guineas
<i>reading</i>	cheap romance, 1s.	play quarto, 6d.	pamphlet, 1 to 6d.	issue of <i>The Gentleman's Magazine</i> , 6d.	issue of <i>Edinburgh Review</i> , 6s.	copy of the <i>Times</i> , 3d.
	a Latin Bible, 2 to £4	Shakespeare's <i>First Folio</i> (1623), £1	student Bible, 6s.	cheap edition of Milton, 2s.	membership in circulating library (3rd class), £1 4s. a year	illustrated edition of <i>Through the Looking-glass</i> , 6s.
	payment for illuminating a liturgical book, £22 9s.	Foxe's <i>Acts and Monuments</i> , 24s.	Hobbes's <i>Leviathan</i> , 8s.	Johnson's <i>Dictionary</i> , folio, 2 vols., £4 10s.	1st edition of Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , 18s.	1st edition of Trollope's <i>The Way We Live Now</i> , 2 vols., £1 1s.
<i>transportation</i>	night's supply of hay for horse, 2d.	wherry (whole boat) across Thames, 1d.	day's journey, coach, 10s.	boat across Thames, 4d.	coach ride, outside, 2 to 3d. a mile; inside,	15-minute journey in a London cab, 1s. 6d.

					4 to 5d. a mile	
	coach, £8	hiring a horse for a day, 12d.	coach horse, £30	coach fare, London to Edinburgh, £4 10s.	palanquin transport in Madras, 5s. a day	railway, 3rd class, London to Plymouth, 18s. 8d. (about 1d. a mile)
	quality horse, £10	hiring a coach for a day, 10s.	fancy carriage, £170	transport to America, £5	passage, Liverpool to New York, £10	passage to India, 1st class, £50
<i>clothes</i>	clothing allowance for peasant, 3s. a year	shoes with buckles, 8d.	footman's frieze coat, 15s.	working woman's gown, 6s. 6d.	checked muslin, 7s. per yard	flannel for a cheap petticoat, 1s. 3d. a yard
	shoes for gentry wearer, 4d.	woman's gloves, £1 5s.	falconer's hat, 10s.	gentleman's suit, £8	hiring a dressmaker for a pelisse, 8s.	overcoat for an Eton schoolboy, £1 1s.
	hat for gentry wearer, 10d.	fine cloak, £16	black cloth for mourning household of an earl, £100	very fine wig, £30	ladies silk stockings, 12s.	set of false teeth, £2 10s.
<i>labor/incomes</i>	hiring a skilled building worker, 4d. a day	actor's daily wage during playing season, 1s.	agricultural laborer, 6s. 5d. a week	price of enslaved boy, £32	lowest-paid sailor on Royal Navy ship, 10s. 9d. a month	seasonal agricultural laborer, 14s. a week
	wage for professional scribe, £2	household servant 2 to £5 a year + food, clothing	tutor to nobleman's children, £30 a year	housemaid's wage, £6 to £8 a year	contributor to <i>Quarterly Review</i> , 10	housemaid's wage, £10 to £25 a year

	3s. 4d. a year + cloak				guineas per sheet	
	minimum income to be called gentleman, £10 a year; for knighthood, 40 to £400	minimum income for eligibility for knighthood, £30 a year	Milton's salary as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, £288 a year	Boswell's allowance, £200 a year	minimum income for a "genteel" family, £100 a year	income of the "comfortable" classes, £800 and up a year
	income from land of richest magnates, £3,500 a year	income from land of average earl, £4,000 a year	Earl of Bedford's income, £8,000 a year	Duke of Newcastle's income, £40,000 a year	Mr. Darcy's income, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , £10,000	Trollope's income, £4,000 a year

The British Baronage

The English monarchy is in principle hereditary, though at times during the Middle Ages the rules were subject to dispute. As it stands now, authority passes from parent to eldest surviving child, to siblings in order of seniority if there are no children, and in default of direct descendants to collateral lines (cousins, nephews, nieces) in order of closeness. There have been breaks in the order of succession (1066, 1399, 1688), but so far as possible the usurpers have always sought to paper over the break with a legitimate, that is, hereditary, claim. When a queen succeeds to the throne and takes a husband, he does not become king unless he is in the line of blood succession; rather, he is named prince consort, as Albert was to Victoria. He may be the father of kings, but he is not one himself.

The original Saxon nobles were the king's thanes, ealdormen, or earls, who provided the king with military service and counsel in return for booty, gifts, or landed estates. William the Conqueror, arriving from France, where feudalism was fully developed, considerably expanded this group. In addition, as the king distributed the lands of his new kingdom, he also distributed dignities to men who became known collectively as "the baronage." "Baron" in its root meaning signifies simply "man," and barons were the king's men. As the title was common, a distinction was early made between greater and lesser barons, the former gradually assuming loftier and more impressive titles. The first English "duke" was created in 1337; the title of "marquess," or "marquis" (pronounced "markwis"), followed in 1385, and "viscount" ("vyekount") in 1440. Though "earl" is the oldest title of all, an earl now comes between a marquess and a viscount in order of dignity and precedence, and the old term "baron" now designates a rank just below viscount. "Baronets" were created in 1611 as a means of raising revenue for the crown (the title could be purchased for about

£1,000); they are marginal nobility and have never sat in the House of Lords.

Kings and queens are addressed as "Your Majesty," princes and princesses as "Your Highness," the other hereditary nobility as "My Lord" or "Your Lordship." Peers receive their titles either by inheritance (like Lord Byron, the sixth baron of that line) or from the monarch (like Alfred, Lord Tennyson, created 1st Baron Tennyson by Victoria). The children, even of a duke, are commoners unless they are specifically granted some other title or inherit their father's title from him. A peerage can be forfeited by act of attainder, as for example when a lord is convicted of treason; and, when forfeited, or lapsed for lack of a successor, can be bestowed on another family. Thus in 1605 Robert Cecil was made first Earl of Salisbury in the third creation, the first creation dating from 1149, the second from 1337, the title having been in abeyance since 1539. Titles descend by right of succession and do not depend on tenure of land; thus, a title does not always indicate where a lord dwells or holds power. Indeed, noble titles do not always refer to a real place at all. At Prince Edward's marriage in 1999, the queen created him Earl of Wessex, although the old kingdom of Wessex has had no political existence since 1066, and the name was all but forgotten until it was resurrected by Thomas Hardy as the setting of his novels. (This is perhaps but one of many ways in which the world of the aristocracy increasingly resembles the realm of literature.)

Scottish peers sat in the parliament of Scotland, as English peers did in the parliament of England, till at the Act of Union (1707) Scottish peers were granted sixteen seats in the English House of Lords, to be filled by election. (In 1963, all Scottish lords were allowed to sit.) Similarly, Irish peers, when the Irish parliament was abolished in 1801, were granted the right to elect twenty-eight of their number to the House of Lords in Westminster. (Now that the Republic of Ireland is a separate nation, this no longer applies.) Women members (peeresses) were first allowed to sit in the House as nonhereditary Life Peers in 1958 (when that status was created for members of both genders); women first sat by their own hereditary

right in 1963. Today the House of Lords still retains some power to influence or delay legislation, but its future is uncertain. In 1999, the hereditary peers (then amounting to 750) were reduced to 92 temporary members elected by their fellow peers. Holders of Life Peerages remain, as do senior bishops of the Church of England and high-court judges (the “Law Lords”).

The king and queen	(These are all of the royal line.)
Prince and princess	
Duke and duchess	(These may or may not be of the royal line, but are ordinarily remote from the succession.)
Marquess and marchioness	
Earl and countess	
Viscount and viscountess	
Baron and baroness	
Baronet and lady	

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Below the peerage the chief title of honor is “knight.” Knighthood, which is not hereditary, is generally a reward for services rendered. A knight (Sir John Black) is addressed, using his first name, as “Sir John”; his wife, using the last name, is “Lady Black”—unless she is the daughter of an earl or nobleman of higher rank, in which case she will be “Lady Arabella.” The female equivalent of a knight bears the title of “Dame.” Though the word *knight* itself comes from the Old English *cniht*, there is some doubt as to whether knighthood amounted to much before the arrival of the Normans. The feudal system required military service as a condition of land tenure, and a man who came to serve his king at the head of an army of tenants required a title of authority and badges of identity—hence the title of knighthood and the coat of arms. During the Crusades, when men were far removed from their land (or even sold it in order to go on crusade), more elaborate forms of fealty sprang up that soon expanded into orders of knighthood. The Templars, Hospitallers, Knights of the Teutonic Order, Knights of Malta, and Knights of the Golden Fleece were but a few of these companionships; not all of them were available at all times in England.

Gradually, with the rise of centralized government and the decline of feudal tenures, military knighthood became obsolete, and the rank largely honorific; sometimes, as under James I, it degenerated into a scheme of the royal government for making money. For hundreds of years after its establishment in the fourteenth century, the Order of the Garter was the only English order of knighthood, an exclusive courtly companionship. Then, during the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth centuries, a number of additional orders were created, with names such as the Thistle, Saint Patrick, the Bath, Saint Michael, and Saint George, plus a number of special Victorian and Indian orders. They retain the terminology, ceremony, and dignity of knighthood, but the military implications are vestigial.

Although the British Empire now belongs to history, appointments to the Order of the British Empire continue to be conferred for

services to that empire at home or abroad. Such honors (commonly referred to as “gongs”) are granted by the monarch in New Year’s and Birthday lists, but the decisions are now made by the government in power. In recent years there have been efforts to popularize and democratize the dispensation of honors, with recipients including celebrities of all types. But this does not prevent large sectors of British society from regarding both knighthood and the peerage as largely irrelevant to modern life.

The Royal Lines of England and Great Britain

England

SAXONS AND DANES

Egbert, king of Wessex802–839

Ethelwulf, son of Egbert839–858

Ethelbald, second son of Ethelwulf858–860

Ethelbert, third son of Ethelwulf860–866

Ethelred I, fourth son of Ethelwulf866–871

Alfred the Great, fifth son of Ethelwulf871–899

Edward the Elder, son of Alfred899–924

Athelstan the Glorious, son of Edward924–940

Edmund I, third son of Edward940–946

Edred, fourth son of Edward946–955

Edwy the Fair, son of Edmund955–959

Edgar the Peaceful, second son of Edmund959–975

Edward the Martyr, son of Edgar975–978 (murdered)

Ethelred II, the Unready, second son of Edgar978–1016

Edmund II, Ironside, son of Ethelred II1016–1016

Canute the Dane1016–1035

Harold I, Harefoot, natural son of Canute1035–1040

Hardecanute, son of Canute1040–1042

Edward the Confessor, son of Ethelred II1042–1066

Harold II, brother-in-law of Edward1066–1066 (died in battle)

HOUSE OF NORMANDY

William I, the Conqueror1066–1087

William II, Rufus, third son of William I1087–1100 (shot from ambush)

Henry I, Beauclerc, youngest son of William I1100–1135

HOUSE OF BLOIS

Stephen, son of Adela, daughter of William I1135–1154

HOUSE OF PLANTAGENET

Henry II, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet by Matilda, daughter of Henry I1154–1189

Richard I, Coeur de Lion, son of Henry II1189–1199

John Lackland, son of Henry II1199–1216

Henry III, son of John1216–1272

Edward I, Longshanks, son of Henry III1272–1307

Edward II, son of Edward I1307–1327 (deposed)

Edward III of Windsor, son of Edward II 1327–1377

Richard II, grandson of Edward III 1377–1399 (deposed)

HOUSE OF LANCASTER

Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, son of Edward III 1399–1413

Henry V, Prince Hal, son of Henry IV 1413–1422

Henry VI, son of Henry V 1422–1461 (deposed),
1470–1471 (deposed)

HOUSE OF YORK

Edward IV, great-great-grandson of Edward III 1461–1470
(deposed), 1471–1483

Edward V, son of Edward IV 1483–1483 (murdered)

Richard III, Crookback 1483–1485 (died in battle)

HOUSE OF TUDOR

Henry VII, married daughter of Edward IV 1485–1509

Henry VIII, son of Henry VII 1509–1547

Edward VI, son of Henry VIII 1547–1553

Mary I, “Bloody,” daughter of Henry VIII 1553–1558

Elizabeth I, daughter of Henry VIII 1558–1603

HOUSE OF STUART

James I (James VI of Scotland)1603–1625

Charles I, son of James I1625–1649 (executed)

COMMONWEALTH & PROTECTORATE

Council of State1649–1653

Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector1653–1658

Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver1658–1660 (resigned)

HOUSE OF STUART (RESTORED)

Charles II, son of Charles I1660–1685

James II, second son of Charles I1685–1688

(INTERREGNUM, 11 DECEMBER 1688 TO 13 FEBRUARY 1689)

HOUSE OF ORANGE-NASSAU

William III of Orange, by
Mary, daughter of Charles I
and Mary II, daughter of James II1689–1701

–1694

Anne, second daughter of James II1702–1714

Great Britain

HOUSE OF HANOVER

George I, son of Elector of Hanover and Sophia, granddaughter of James I 1714–1727

George II, son of George I 1727–1760

George III, grandson of George II 1760–1820

George IV, son of George III 1820–1830

William IV, third son of George III 1830–1837

Victoria, daughter of Edward, fourth son of George III 1837–1901

HOUSE OF SAXE-COBURG AND GOTHA

Edward VII, son of Victoria 1901–1910

HOUSE OF WINDSOR (NAME ADOPTED 17 JULY 1917)

George V, second son of Edward VII 1910–1936

Edward VIII, eldest son of George V 1936–1936 (abdicated)

George VI, second son of George V 1936–1952

Elizabeth II, daughter of George VI 1952–2022

Charles III, son of Elizabeth II 2022–

Religions in Great Britain

In the late sixth century C.E., missionaries from Rome introduced Christianity to Britons—actually, reintroduced it, since it had briefly flourished in the southern parts of the British Isles during the Roman occupation, and even after the Roman withdrawal had persisted in the Celtic regions of Scotland and Wales. By the time the earliest poems included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* were composed (the seventh century), therefore, there had been a Christian presence in the British Isles for hundreds of years. The conversion of the Germanic occupiers of England can, however, be dated only from 597. Our knowledge of the religion of pre-Christian Britain is sketchy, but it is likely that vestiges of Germanic polytheism assimilated into, or coexisted with, the practice of Christianity: fertility rites were incorporated into the celebration of Easter resurrection, rituals commemorating the dead into All-Hallows Eve and All Saints Day, and elements of winter solstice festivals into the celebration of Christmas. The most durable polytheistic remains are the days of the week, each of which except “Saturday” derives from the name of a Germanic pagan god, and the word “Easter,” deriving, according to the great monastic scholar Bede (ca. 673–735), from the name of a Germanic pagan goddess, Eostre. In English literature such “folkloric” elements sometimes elicit romantic nostalgia. Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath” looks back to a magical time before the arrival of Christianity in which the land was “fulfild of fairye.” Hundreds of years later, the seventeenth-century writer Robert Herrick honors the amalgamation of Christian and pagan elements in agrarian British culture in such poems as “Corinna’s Gone A-Maying” and “The Hock Cart.”

Medieval Christianity was fairly uniform, if complex, across Western Europe—hence called “catholic,” or universally shared. The Church was composed of the so-called “regular” and “secular” orders, the regular orders being those who followed a rule in a

community under an abbot or an abbess (that is, monks, nuns, friars, and canons), while the secular clergy of priests served parish communities under the governance of a bishop. In the unstable period from the sixth until the twelfth century, monasteries were the intellectual powerhouse of the Church. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the development of an urban Christian spirituality in Europe, friars dominated the recently invented institution of universities, as well as devoting themselves, in theory at least, to the urban poor.

The Catholic Church was also an international power structure. With its hierarchy of pope, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, it offered a model of the centralized, bureaucratic state from the late eleventh century. That ecclesiastical power structure coexisted alongside a separate, often less centralized and feudal structure of lay authorities, with theoretically different and often competing spheres of social responsibilities. The sharing of lay and ecclesiastical authority in medieval England was sometimes a source of conflict. Chaucer's pilgrims are on their way to visit the memorial shrine to one victim of such exemplary struggle: Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who opposed the policies of King Henry II, was assassinated by indirect suggestion of the king in 1170, and later made a saint. The Church, in turn, produced its own victims: Jews were subject to persecution in the late twelfth century in England, before being expelled in 1290. From the beginning of the fifteenth century, the English Church targeted Lollard heretics (see below) with capital punishment, for the first time.

As an international organization, the Church conducted its business in the universal language of Latin. Thus although in the period the largest segment of literate persons was made up of clerics, the clerical contribution to great literary writing in vernacular languages (for example, French and English) was, so far as we know, relatively modest, with some great exceptions in the later Middle Ages (for example, William Langland). Lay, vernacular writers of the period certainly reflect the importance of the Church as an institution and the pervasiveness of religion in the rituals that

marked everyday life, as well as contesting institutional authority. From the late fourteenth century, indeed, England witnessed an active and articulate, proto-Protestant movement known as Lollardy, which attacked clerical hierarchy and promoted vernacular scriptures.

Beginning in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther, in Wittenberg, Germany, openly challenged many aspects of Catholic practice and by 1520 had completely repudiated the authority of the pope, setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Luther argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed far from the pattern of Christianity laid out in scripture. He rejected Catholic doctrines for which no biblical authority was to be found, such as the belief in Purgatory, and translated the Bible into German, on the grounds that the importance of scripture for all Christians made its translation into the vernacular tongue essential. Luther was not the first to advance such views—Lollard followers of the Englishman John Wycliffe had translated the Bible in the late fourteenth century. But Luther, protected by powerful German rulers, was able to speak out without fear of punishment and convert others to his views, rather than suffer the persecution usually meted out to heretics. Soon other reformers were following in Luther's footsteps: of these, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli and the French Jean Calvin would be especially influential for English religious thought.

At first England remained staunchly Catholic. Its king, Henry VIII, was so severe to heretics that the pope awarded him the title "Defender of the Faith," which British monarchs have retained to this day. In 1534, however, Henry rejected the authority of the pope to prevent his divorce from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, and his marriage to his mistress, Ann Boleyn. In doing so, Henry appropriated to himself ecclesiastical as well as secular authority. Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was executed in 1535 for refusing to endorse Henry's right to govern the English church. Over the following six years, Henry consolidated his grip on the ecclesiastical establishment by dissolving the powerful, populous Catholic monasteries and redistributing their massive landholdings to his own

lay followers. Yet Henry's church largely retained Catholic doctrine and liturgy. When Henry died and his young son, Edward, came to the throne in 1547, the English church embarked on a more Protestant path, a direction abruptly reversed when Edward died and his older sister Mary, the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, took the throne in 1553 and attempted to reintroduce Roman Catholicism. Mary's reign was also short, however, and her successor, Elizabeth I, the daughter of Ann Boleyn, was a Protestant. Elizabeth attempted to establish a "middle way" Christianity, compromising between Roman Catholic practices and beliefs and reformed ones.

The Church of England, though it laid claim to a national rather than pan-European authority, aspired like its predecessor to be the universal church of all English subjects. It retained the Catholic structure of parishes and dioceses and the Catholic hierarchy of bishops, though the ecclesiastical authority was now the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Church's "Supreme Governor" was the monarch. Yet disagreement and controversy persisted. Some members of the Church of England wanted to retain many of the ritual and liturgical elements of Catholicism. Others, the Puritans, advocated a more thoroughgoing reformation. Most Puritans remained within the Church of England, but a minority, the "Separatists" or "Congregationalists," split from the established church altogether. These dissenters no longer thought of the ideal church as an organization to which everybody belonged; instead, they conceived it as a more exclusive group of likeminded people, one not necessarily attached to a larger body of believers.

In the seventeenth century, the succession of the Scottish king James to the English throne produced another problem. England and Scotland were separate nations, and in the sixteenth century Scotland had developed its own national Presbyterian church, or "kirk," under the leadership of the reformer John Knox. The kirk retained fewer Catholic liturgical elements than did the Church of England, and its authorities, or "presbyters," were elected by assemblies of their fellow clerics, rather than appointed by the king. James I and his son Charles I, especially the latter, wanted to bring

the Scottish kirk into conformity with Church of England practices. The Scots violently resisted these efforts, with the collaboration of many English Puritans, in a conflict that eventually developed into the English Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. The effect of these disputes is visible in the poetry of such writers as John Milton, Robert Herrick, Henry Vaughan, and Thomas Traherne, and in the prose of Thomas Browne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Dorothy Waugh. Just as in the mid-sixteenth century, when a succession of monarchs with different religious commitments destabilized the church, so the seventeenth century endured spiritual whiplash. King Charles I's highly ritualistic Church of England was violently overturned by the Puritan victors in the Civil War—until 1660, after the death of the Puritan leader, Oliver Cromwell, when the Church of England was restored along with the monarchy.

The religious and political upheavals of the seventeenth century produced Christian sects that de-emphasized the ceremony of the established church and rejected as well its top-down authority structure. Some of these groups were ephemeral, but the Baptists (founded in 1608 in Amsterdam by the English expatriate John Smyth) and Quakers, or Society of Friends (founded by George Fox in the 1640s), flourished outside the established church, sometimes despite cruel persecution. John Bunyan, a Baptist, wrote the Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison. Some dissenters, like the Baptists, shared the reformed reverence for the absolute authority of scripture but interpreted the scriptural texts differently from their fellow Protestants. Others, like the Quakers, favored, even over the authority of the Bible, the "inner light" or voice of individual conscience, which they took to be the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals.

The Protestant dissenters were not England's only religious minorities. Despite crushing fines and the threat of imprisonment, a minority of Catholics under Elizabeth and James openly refused to give their allegiance to the new church, and others remained secret adherents to the old ways. John Donne was brought up in an ardently Catholic family, and several other writers converted to

Catholicism as adults—Ben Jonson for a considerable part of his career, Elizabeth Carey and Richard Crashaw permanently, and at profound personal cost. In the eighteenth century, Catholics remained objects of suspicion as possible agents of sedition, especially after the “Glorious Revolution” in 1688 deposed the Catholic James II in favor of the Protestant William and Mary. Anti-Catholic prejudice affected John Dryden, a Catholic convert, as well as the lifelong Catholic Alexander Pope. By contrast, the English colony of Ireland remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the fervor of its religious commitment at least partly inspired by resistance to English occupation. Starting in the reign of Elizabeth, England shored up its own authority in Ireland by encouraging Protestant immigrants from Scotland to settle in the north of Ireland, producing a virulent religious divide the effects of which are still felt today.

A small community of Jews had moved from France to London after 1066, when the Norman William the Conqueror came to the English throne. Although despised and persecuted by many Christians, they were allowed to remain as moneylenders to the Crown, until the thirteenth century, when the king developed alternative sources of credit. At this point, in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England. In 1655 Oliver Cromwell permitted a few to return, and in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Jewish population slowly increased, mainly by immigration from Germany. In the mid-eighteenth century some prominent Jews had their children brought up as Christians so as to facilitate their full integration into English society: thus the nineteenth-century writer and politician Benjamin Disraeli, although he and his father were members of the Church of England, was widely considered a Jew insofar as his ancestry was Jewish.

In the late seventeenth century, as the Church of England reasserted itself, Catholics, Jews, and dissenting Protestants found themselves subject to significant legal restrictions. The Corporation Act, passed in 1661, and the Test Act, passed in 1673, excluded all who refused to take communion in the Church of England from

voting, attending university, or working in government or in the professions. Members of religious minorities, as well as Church of England communicants, paid mandatory taxes in support of Church of England ministers and buildings. In 1689 the dissenters gained the right to worship in public, but Jews and Catholics were not permitted to do so.

During the eighteenth century, political, intellectual, and religious history remained closely intertwined. The Church of England came to accommodate a good deal of variety. "Low church" services resembled those of the dissenting Protestant churches, minimizing ritual and emphasizing the sermon; the "high church" retained more elaborate ritual elements, yet its prestige was under attack on several fronts. Many Enlightenment thinkers subjected the Bible to rational critique and found it wanting: the philosopher David Hume, for instance, argued that the "miracles" described therein were more probably lies or errors than real breaches of the laws of nature. Within the Church of England, the "broad church" Latitudinarians welcomed this rationalism, advocating theological openness and an emphasis on ethics rather than dogma. More radically, the Unitarian movement rejected the divinity of Christ while professing to accept his ethical teachings. Taking a different tack, the preacher John Wesley, founder of Methodism, responded to the rationalists' challenge with a newly fervent call to evangelism and personal discipline; his movement was particularly successful in Wales. Revolutions in America and France at the end of the century generated considerable millenarian excitement and fostered more new religious ideas, often in conjunction with a radical social agenda. Many important writers of the Romantic period were indebted to traditions of protestant dissent: Unitarian and rationalist protestant ideas influenced William Hazlitt, Anna Barbauld, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the young Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Blake created a highly idiosyncratic poetic mythology loosely indebted to radical strains of Christian mysticism. Others were even more heterodox: Lord Byron and Robert Burns, brought up as Scots

Presbyterians, rebelled fiercely, and Percy Shelley's writing of an atheistic pamphlet resulted in his expulsion from Oxford.

Great Britain never erected an American-style "wall of separation" between church and state, but in practice religion and secular affairs grew more and more distinct during the nineteenth century. In consequence, members of religious minorities no longer seemed to pose a threat to the commonweal. A movement to repeal the Test Act failed in the 1790s, but a renewed effort resulted in the extension of the franchise to dissenting Protestants in 1828 and to Catholics in 1829. The numbers of Roman Catholics in England were swelled by immigration from Ireland, but there were also some prominent English adherents. Among writers, the converts John Newman and Gerard Manley Hopkins are especially important. The political participation and social integration of Jews presented a thornier challenge. Lionel de Rothschild, repeatedly elected to represent London in Parliament during the 1840s and 1850s, was not permitted to take his seat there because he refused to take his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian"; finally, in 1858, the Jewish Disabilities Act allowed him to omit these words. Only in 1871, however, were Oxford and Cambridge opened to non-Anglicans.

Meanwhile geological discoveries and Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories increasingly cast doubt on the literal truth of the Creation story, and close philological analysis of the biblical text suggested that its origins were human rather than divine. By the end of the nineteenth century, many writers were bearing witness to a world in which Christianity no longer seemed fundamentally plausible. In his poetry and prose, Thomas Hardy depicts a world devoid of benevolent providence. Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is in part an elegy to lost spiritual assurance, as the "Sea of Faith" goes out like the tide: "But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar / Retreating." For Arnold, literature must replace religion as a source of spiritual truth, and intimacy between individuals substitute for the lost communal solidarity of the universal church.

The work of many twentieth-century writers shows the influence of a religious upbringing or a religious conversion in adulthood. T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden embrace Anglicanism, William Butler Yeats spiritualism. James Joyce repudiates Irish Catholicism but remains obsessed with it. Yet religion, or lack of it, is a matter of individual choice and conscience, not social or legal mandate. Over the past several decades, church attendance has plummeted in Great Britain. Only about 46 percent of the population identified itself as “Christian” on the 2021 census. Meanwhile, immigration from former British colonies as well as other countries has swelled the ranks of religions once uncommon in the British Isles—Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist—though the numbers of adherents remain small relative to the total population.

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